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THE PRETTY PURITAN; OR, THE MYSTERY OF THE TORN ENVELOPE.

BY A PARSON'S DAUGHTER.



IN HER SLEEP SHE HAD GOTTEN UP, OPENED AND CLOSED THE BOX, AND CARRIED THE TORN ENVELOPE BACK TO BED WITH HER.

The Pretty Puritan;

OR,

The Mystery of the Torn Envelope.

BY "A PARSON'S DAUGHTER."

CHAPTER I.

THE TORN ENVELOPE.

AN August morning had dawned so pleasant, and rarely cool, that most of the visitors at Wilde Manor had availed themselves of it, to walk or ride, leaving the occupancy of the luxurious, wind-swept parlor to Mrs. Wilde and her favorite young lady guest—Agnes Gardiner.

The well-preserved, stylish elder lady skimmed lightly through a new novel, while her companion, a handsome girl, dressed in a dainty morning-dress of lavender-tinted organdy that well became the clear, exquisite pallor of her complexion, assorted some bright silks, with which she was embroidering.

Presently the delicious quiet was broken by the entrance of a servant.

"Your letters, Mrs. Wilde, and two for Miss Gardiner."

"Thanks," smiled Agnes, deftly clipping the ends of the envelopes with her little embroidery scissors. "Two—from mamma; that is odd! Ah! no, one is from Rachel!" and the young lady swiftly opened a letter postmarked "Denver, Col.," and addressed to "Meadow Grange, N. J.," whence Mrs. Gardiner had remailed it to her daughter.

Rachel Wallbridge and Agnes Gardiner had been chums through an entire college course at Vassar; after graduation, Miss Wallbridge had visited Meadow Grange, the fine old homestead of the Gardiners, and, later, Agnes had gone to Chicago, to act as bridesmaid upon the occasion of Rachel's marriage to Mr. Lysson. After their wedding tour, Mr. and Mrs. Lysson had immediately settled in Denver, and the friends had not met since.

This letter announced that the Lyssons were going to Europe, for a stay of several years, and that, on their way from the West, they should have two nights to spare in New York, and begged of Agnes to meet them there.

"Mrs. Wilde," said Agnes, when both ladies had finished reading their correspondence, "I wish to go to town immediately; can a carriage take me to the next train?"

"Of course, my dear; I will ring for James, and you can send whatever order you wish to the stables; but are you sure you really must go? If it is business, can you not telegraph?"

"It is not business entirely, though mamma wishes me to transact a little for her; but my old Vassar chum, Rachel Lysson, is in town, preparatory to starting for Europe. She is to stay abroad some years, and as I have not seen her since her marriage, I desire to spend a day or two with her."

"Oh, my dear!" cried Mrs. Wilde, in consternation, "for how long do you mean to leave us?"

"Only until Wednesday night," laughed Miss Gardiner. "This letter is somewhat late in reaching me, as it was sent to Meadow Grange, and I find that the Lyssons arrive in town this morning, and sail Thursday."

"Well, I suppose I shall have to spare you," replied Mrs. Wilde, with assumed comical resignation. "I hope you will enjoy yourself, my dear."

"Thank you," laughed Agnes, as she hastened away, to make her arrangements for the journey.

Half an hour later, just as Miss Gardiner was taking her place in the carriage, her handsome black silk suit entirely covered by a linen ulster, her stylish hat of chip—with its graceful feathers and brilliant blooms and face trimmings of jetty velvet that the wearer so well knew set off the perfect-sculptured beauty of her pale face—hidden from dust and cinders under folds of pale blue grenadine, a knot of pansies at her belt, a new book upon the cushions, and the most faultless of undressed kid gloves hiding the whiteness but not the shapeliness of her fine hands, Mr. Van Alst and Flossy Rodwell came up from their walk to the village.

"Not going away, Miss Gardiner, surely?" called Mr. Van Alst.

"Only for two days," lightly answered Agnes.

"Or you may be sure I should exercise my vetoing-power," gayly added Mrs. Wilde, standing upon the lowest step of the broad marble flight that formed the imposing entrance to her river-home.

"Only two days!" echoed Mr. Van Alst, as he came and leaned upon the carriage door. "You say it as joyously as if you did not know you were leaving us all inconsolable."

"Oh! my conscience is quite easy on that score, Mr. Van Alst, and Mrs. Wilde will explain my abrupt departure. If I catch this train I must hurry away, so good-by to you all—good-by, Mrs. Wilde."

"Good-by, dear, and be sure to get back by Wednesday."

"And will you not give me those pansies—or one, only one, to cherish until your return?" begged Mr. Van Alst, softly, as the driver gave the ribbons to the restless horses.

Miss Gardiner smiled, one of her superb, dazzling smiles, but she colored a trifle, too, despite the thoroughness with which she was accustomed to hold her emotions in hand, as she tore the pansies away from her belt and gave them to the pleader; then the carriage whirled them apart; but all the time that it hurried her to the depot, and all the time the train was steaming along the river banks toward the hot and dusty metropolis, she was thinking of, or trying not to think of, Carl Van Alst's last words; for the man had come nearer to winning her love than any other she had ever known; and she believed that he loved her; and she was not unused to men's flatteries, either.

It was after two o'clock when Miss Gardiner arrived at the Grand Central Depot, and took a carriage direct to the hotel on Union Square, where, with her mother, she was in the habit of spending the winter months. There she was immediately shown to a pleasant room, overlooking the park; and after dispatching a note—announcing her arrival—to Mrs. Lysson, who was to stop with some distant relatives of her husband's, she proceeded to unpack her sachel and put the contents in the bureau. As she pulled open the upper drawer she peered in, curiously, to see if any rubbish had been poked away in its corners by the latest occupants of the room; for the apartment was one ordinarily used for transient guests. There was only a hairpin or two, and a torn envelope, bearing the address:

"MRS. ELISE P. CHANDOR,
"Southern Hotel,"
"City."

Agnes commenced transferring her traps from the sachel into the drawer, and meanwhile fell to idly wondering where the Southern Hotel was, and why the letter to Mrs. Elise P. Chandor had not been addressed to the hotel where she evidently had stopped. Then she thought she might not have read the name aright, and so glanced at the envelope again. This time she noticed the postmark—it was St. Louis, Mo., April 22, 9 A. M. So *this* Southern Hotel was in St. Louis. Agnes tossed the paper into one of the side-boxes upon the top of the bureau, and, her arrangements completed, went down to order her luncheon.

It was a most elegant young woman—lissom and seductively graceful in her every movement, with an exquisitely-molded figure, the voluptuous outlines of which no costume could conceal—who walked into the almost deserted dining-salon, and ordered her dainty luncheon of cold chicken, potatoes *a la* Saratoga, iced and pitted olives, creamy ale, and Charlotte russe. Thin, wide, filigree bracelets, of dead yellow gold and turquoise, clasped her wrists, and a collar of the same banded the silk and *visse* plaiting at her throat; the delicate blue of the jewels and the glossy black silk costume contrasting finely with that colorless purity of complexion that was one of the beautiful Miss Gardiner's chief charms. Then her hair—in its extreme luxuriance the envy of all her friends—a fair, lustrous brown, slightly tinged toward red, was excessively becoming in the way she wore it—turned from one side to the other over a high puff, with heavy braids at the back fastened low. Her face was a perfect oval, with clear-cut, high-bred features: almost straight, dark line of brow; deep violet eyes—eyes that held a thousand varying expressions under their darkening, sweeping lashes; a delicate nose, with sensitive nostrils that spoke swiftly every shade of pride, or disdain, or anger, that ruffled the girl's soul; a beautiful chin, and a scarlet mouth, bow-shaped, with thin lips curving over faultless teeth—a mouth ordinarily rather mobile and yielding, but with lines about it that could settle into a still immutableness.

Miss Gardiner had finished the substantial part of her luncheon, and sat idly regarding a pile of downy peaches, in that vague, and dreamy, and trifling state of mind which accompanies perfect rest and a knowledge of time to kill; wondering which was the most luscious

of all the pile—most worthy her tasting. Just as she put out her hand to select the handsomest fruit, a silver salver was brought her and upon it a note, which read:

"MY DARLING AGNES:

"Your note just received, and if Mr. Lysson were here, he would go for you; but though I expect his return momentarily, I cannot wait, so send a carriage and beg that you will come instantly to us. You must dine with us and join our theater-party to-night—only Mr. Lysson's cousins, besides ourselves. Come as soon as you get this. Your own
"RACHEL."

Agnes ate her peaches, and donning her hat rode away to meet her friend.

It was late when the carriage returned her to her hotel that night, and she went directly to her room, locked the door, disrobed by the light of the lamps in the square, wound her watch and put it and her pocket-book under her pillow, and went to bed, and almost immediately to sleep.

Before sunrise the noises in the square awoke Miss Gardiner, floating upward, through the open window, to ears accustomed to country quiet; but the horizon above the piles of stone and brick reflected rosily the ruddy eastern sky, and she started up under a momentary impression that the hour was later. The motion was accompanied by a tremor of pain along her right arm, and the crisp rustling of paper over which her right hand was clenched so tightly as to have become positively numb.

From where had the paper come? She smoothed it—and read:

"MRS. ELISE P. CHANDOR,
"Southern Hotel,"
"City."

Thoroughly aroused, Agnes sprung from bed and opened the bureau-box into which she had thrown this envelope the previous afternoon. The lid had been closed upon emptiness. In her astonishment she tried the lock of her door, and examined her watch and pocket-book, to be sure that her room had not been entered during the night. Evidently she had been its undisturbed possessor, and she could entertain but one theory concerning this peculiar incident. In her sleep she had gotten up, opened and closed the box, and carried the torn envelope back to bed with her, and all without awakening; yet, she had never been known to talk or walk in her sleep during all her life.

What was the peculiarity about this bit of paper that had affected her senses contrary to the habits of a lifetime and with a power that conquered the lethargy of deep slumber? This was the question that Miss Gardiner asked herself, again and again, as she returned to bed; and that effectually drove away further sleep.

CHAPTER II.

A THREAD OF A MYSTERY.

THE second day of Agnes's renewed association with her former friend was spent in a gay round of sight-seeing; and with visits to art galleries and museums, and bustle of driving from place to place, the incident of the morning quite escaped her mind.

Mr. and Mrs. Lysson returned to her hotel, to dine with her before finishing the evening at one of Thomas's inimitable garden concerts, and as Rachel stood in Agnes's room, rearranging her toilet, the incident of the envelope suddenly recurred to Miss Gardiner.

"Rachel," she exclaimed, as she took Mrs. Lysson's place before the mirror, and lightly touched to place the short, shadowy, soft brown hair that lay lightly upon her forehead—just relieving its beauty of breadth and outline and its delicate pallor, "I did the funniest thing this morning! I will tell you about it while we dine."

"Not now! You know it is never well to awaken my curiosity—I'm a true daughter of our common mother," responded Rachel, laughingly.

"Not now, because the incident has a trifling psychological interest, and I mean to ask your husband's opinion concerning it."

"And not mine! What an implied compliment to my psychological endowments."

"Don't be jealous of my extremely high opinion of your husband, dearie," laughed Agnes, putting her arm within Rachel's as they went down to the cosey, blue-satin comforts of the parlor, where Eric Lysson awaited them.

They stood laughing and chatting a moment ere they sought the dining-room; the sparkle in Rachel's eyes and the scarlet glow burning in her usually fallow cheeks, so strongly reminding her chum of the years past, when they had

been daily associates, that Agnes exclaimed, enthusiastically:

"Rachel, I believe you grow handsomer and younger all the time! Mr. Lysson must have religiously protected you from every shade of trouble to have kept you so like your old self. I feel as if you, rather than I, must be the younger of the two."

Rachel gave a little start, the color in her cheeks lessened, her eyes fell, and her husband answered for her, while Agnes mentally chastised herself for having made a stupid speech.

"No trouble that I can avert ever comes near Rachel, you may be sure, Miss Agnes; but not much can ever have come near you, that you should intimate that you feel like anything but a most beautiful and youthful woman."

"Oh, please do not quite overwhelm me, Mr. Lysson!" Agnes lightly responded. "I shall be twenty-two early next spring! No very terrible age, I admit, though it almost seems so to me! As to trouble—well, we are not quite as rich as I would like to be."

"Certainly an evil that it is in your power, if in any one's, to remedy; at least, if your heart is a well-tutored one, as becomes the age in which we live," retorted Mr. Lysson, as he took the ladies in to dinner.

Rachel had quite recovered her color and her nerve by the time their party was established in the coolest corner of the dining-salon, and an obsequious waiter was taking the order for the choicest of dinners; and she made no delay in gayly demanding a fulfillment of Agnes's promise to tell of "the something funny" she had done that morning.

"What, is Miss Agnes going to regale us with a story?"

"Yes, a story, Eric! Concerning some of her own doings, too. It is sure to be entertaining, so pay your very best attention."

"Oh, pray let us save it, to hear over the walnuts and the wine."

"Now, Rachel, I am almost inclined to say I shall not tell you the incident, it will appear so absurd a trifle after such a prefatory notice; only my kindness of heart makes me take pity on that failing you confessed to have inherited from Mother Eve, and I will mitigate your sentence to the easier penalty of waiting, as Mr. Lysson suggests, until dessert."

"Two against one," laughed Mr. Lysson. "My dear, we shall certainly have to save the story to enjoy with our—fruit, since we cannot have the 'walnuts' Tennyson sings."

"Oh, well, as there is no choice left me, I'll make a virtue of necessity, and submit with good grace!"

"Which will be aided in a great degree by turtle soup and fish boiled in wine," cried Miss Gardiner, gayly. "I remember what a *gourmande* you used to be, Rachel, concerning fish boiled in wine, or served with wine sauce. Don't you know that we used always to order that when we spent a holiday in town?"

"Indeed, I remember; but I took it as brain-food—always! You haven't forgotten how we used to pass our plates up for brains, on fish day at Vassar?"

Merrily recalling college days, and recounting gay adventures, the party discussed the various substantial delicacies of the season, and came at last to fruit, and ices, and Clicquot, and then two voices claimed Agnes's narration.

"I hope you aren't expecting too much in the matter of length or interest," said Agnes, "for your disappointment will be pitiful. It was only a trifle, but such an odd thing for me to do that I thought I would ask your opinion of the act."

Agnes proceeded to relate all that had occurred to so strangely associate her with the torn envelope, and by her words and manner betrayed interest in the apparently trivial affair.

"Was there not something upon this paper that made a deep impression upon your mind?" suggested Mr. Lysson. "Something that surprised you, or aroused your curiosity? You know that the brain maintains a certain amount of activity, even while the body sleeps; the impression may have been greater than you at the time imagined, and deepened and disturbed you after the mental occupation of the day was over and the physical rest had commenced."

"I was not surprised in the least; nor was there anything to arouse my curiosity, except that I wondered, in an idle way, as one will, sometimes, over things which, after all, they are scarcely giving their real thoughts to, where the Southern Hotel was."

"The Southern Hotel?—it is on Broadway, next to the Grand Central."

"Not this one. It proved to be in St. Louis."

"Southern Hotel, St. Louis! Was there an address?"

It was Rachel that spoke, with a startled, eager earnestness of voice and manner.

"My dear—" said Mr. Lysson, tenderly, pleadingly.

"Yes; Mrs. Elise P. Chandor."

Rachel gave a faint cry, and all the glow faded from her face, leaving a frightful sickly, sallow tinge. Even Mr. Lysson looked strangely startled.

"What is it? What is the matter?" cried Agnes.

"My dear Miss Gardiner, do not be alarmed. You have, perhaps, all unintentionally, put into our hands the lost thread of a terrible mystery; and in doing this you have inadvertently touched a wound which is yet sorely sensitive. I see that it is time we were starting for Thomas's. Rachel, love, do you feel quite like going?"

Rachel assented, mechanically; and as the party arose from the table, Mr. Lysson said:

"Tomorrow, Miss Agnes, if you will allow me, I will look at that envelope and make some inquiries concerning it; and perhaps Mrs. Lysson will tell you something of the events it recalls."

"All," said Rachel, looking confidently at her friend. "If Agnes can help us she will be sure to do so."

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY.

THE hall was full, without being crowded; the audience was select, the orchestra at its best, and the selections delightful. Both Rachel and Agnes possessed highly-cultivated musical tastes, and enjoyed to the full the charmed draught of Thomas's exquisite music.

"Shall we stroll into the garden for an ice or a claret?" suggested Mr. Lysson, during one of the intermissions. "You ladies will hardly care for anything else, I presume, as I propose a drive through the park and a supper at Mount Saint Vincent when we leave here."

Leaning upon the gentleman, the ladies followed other promenaders to the garden, and selected a table where they could eat an ice without losing the music, when it recommenced. In taking her place at the table, Agnes dropped her fan, a dainty toy of satin and pearl; a gentleman, just rising to return to the hall, picked it up and politely restored it to her; but one of the frail pearl sticks was broken.

"I regret that the fall has broken it," he said.

"Oh, thank you, sir! I think that may be repaired."

Agnes bowed, and the gentleman moved away with his companions—a *petite*, glowing-faced brunette, and a fair, stately girl, with startlingly-golden hair. Their escort was a handsome man, looking much younger than his nearly sixty years, and his face perplexed Agnes with its vague likeness to some one she had known or seen.

"Agnes," asked Mrs. Lysson, "was that fair young lady at Vassar?"

"I have no recollection of her."

"Her face impressed me as one that I had seen; only I think I should be able to identify that glorious golden hair."

"I thought all females knew how easily such 'glorious golden hair' might be obtained!"

"Eric! You really are too hard on our sex! Why be ready to believe such miserable deceits of any one until proved?—I may have seen a picture of which she reminded me."

"I think such likenesses are often merely fancied," said Miss Gardiner. "The gentleman's face seemed familiar to me, yet I am positive I have never seen him before."

"You may have seen some one very like him," persisted Rachel.

"Perhaps so," said Agnes, indifferently dismissing the subject.

The drive to Mount Saint Vincent, through the sweet dewiness and coolness of the park, under the purple August skies, and golden August stars, was delightful after the warmth and glitter of the concert hall.

As a waiter led the party to a supper-room in the gay restaurant, that once had been the quiet abode of Sisters of Charity, a gentleman and two ladies passed on their way to their carriage—the trio which had been discussed at Thomas's.

"I know her now!" exclaimed Mrs. Lysson, referring to the lovely blonde, as they entered the alcove assigned them. "She is Blanche Lorrimer, and was Elise's chum for a year at Vassar. Her photograph is in Elise's album at home."

"Elise!" cried Agnes, a sudden suspicion flitting through her mind. "Elise, your little sister?"

"Yes," said Rachel, paling, as she had at the mention of the address on the torn envelope. "She entered Vassar the fall after our graduation; you never saw her?"

"No; she did not come on to your wedding."

"It was her first year, and father thought it would make such a break in her studies he would not allow it. Poor little Elise! She felt very badly, but she never dreamed of anything but submission. If it had been me, I should have packed my trunk and started, and let them storm as they chose when I got home! We all imposed on Elise's yielding disposition, even I, who loved her so dearly!"

"You can hardly reproach yourself, Rachel," Mr. Lysson said, gently. "We all thought that it was for the best that Elise should marry Guy."

"Yes, we thought so. How could one tell?—indeed, how can one tell yet what we should have done? You know nothing of the sad affair, Agnes; and as you never saw Elise, you cannot imagine what a timid, gentle, pretty little thing she was. Father and mother were very fond of her; but father never made associates of us girls, and mother is scarcely the person to secure the entire confidence of a girl like Elise, so she was my pet, my darling—almost more like my child than my sister—until I went to Vassar!"

"And then?" said Agnes, sympathetically.

"Then she was so young—not quite thirteen—that we seemed to have almost grown strangers by the time she graduated. She had ceased to cling to me in the old, dependent, affectionate way, though she had no intimate associates, as most girls have. She seemed to live entirely within herself. The fall after I came home she entered college; I had already met Eric, and we were married that winter and settled in Denver. During the following summer Elise visited me, and seemed so excitable and gay that we were all delighted with her spirits."

"That was at the end of her first year at college?"

"Yes, during the latter part of the vacation. We had several visitors besides, purposely to make it pleasant for her. Among them was a Mr. Guy Chandor—I may have mentioned him in some of my letters."

"I think not; I fail to recall the name," answered Agnes.

"He was a wealthy gentleman, partly English and partly French by birth," continued Rachel, scarcely more than trifling with the cold game her husband had put upon her plate, "and very highly connected on both sides. He was about thirty, and exceedingly fine appearing. Eric always admired him immensely."

"That was greatly owing to his manners, Miss Agnes. He was a thorough gentleman—and among his own sex one of the most frank, genial men I ever met. With ladies he was inclined to be rather reservedly courteous."

"But he never was to Elise, Eric. He admired her from the first, Agnes, and they became excellent friends; though Elise was not in the least conscious of his admiration for her. Before she went away he begged that I would convey to her the offer of his hand. When I told her she looked quite frightened, and said that I must not let him think of such a thing. Though an engagement must have been a long one, it seemed most desirable; and I urged her to wait awhile before really dismissing him; as he had said that she was to take plenty of time to decide upon her answer. But she seemed so distressed, and looked so like a frightened child, that I let the matter drop; and told Guy what she had said, and that she was really too young to think of engagements and marriage yet."

"And Mr. Chandor?"

"He seemed quite cut up, but hoped she would change her mind by the next summer."

"Then he was staying there permanently?"

"He went to Colorado for his health, when he was twenty-three, and became infatuated with sheep-raising; he and a partner went into the business and have made a fine fortune. He generally went to England once a year, but made Denver his home, as his partner superintended the ranch. Next month he is going to his home, to stay. He has not crossed the ocean since early in that year he met Elise."

"But Elise changed her mind in regard to him?" questioned Agnes, gently, remembering the name upon the envelope in her room.

"Yes; or we changed it for her," said Mrs. Lysson, with bitter mournfulness. "By the Christmas holidays her health failed her, and the Vassar physician advised her to return home. She was in Chicago a month and then I sent for her. Medicine seemed to do her no good, so I

coaxed her into company, and made it as gay as possible, and she began to improve somewhat. Then I tried to get her to tell me what had been the cause of her low spirits; but she would not own to anything, and evidently so dreaded being alone with me I gave up questioning her. Guy came often to the house, and she appeared afraid of him, too, at first; but he was quietly persistent in his attentions, and one night, after she had twice refused him, he told us that he had at last won her consent to marry him, and desired a speedy wedding; thinking that to take her abroad would be the best thing for her health. It was arranged that he should accompany us immediately to Chicago and remain there until the wedding. That night I went to her room to congratulate her, and found her crying. And from the time of her engagement, to her marriage, she never voluntarily referred to it, nor made any answer to congratulations."

"Did you never think that Elise loved some one else?"

"Often, at first; but she had never mentioned the name of any gentleman she had met or admired; she corresponded with no one; and she told us nothing. What was there to do but let matters take their course, when it seemed a desirable match, and that a sea-voyage, a tour through Europe, meeting with new acquaintances and relatives, and the tenderness of a devoted husband, must be the surest cure for her morbidness?"

"We certainly all thought, even Mr. and Mrs. Wallbridge, that her marriage to a man like Guy Chandor was the best thing that could happen to her," said Mr. Lysson.

"And no doubt, to a degree, you were quite right."

"No! I think we were all wrong," asserted Rachel, "only we could not see it then. The night of the nineteenth of April I went into her room quite late, to kiss her good-night. She was lying upon the bed, and had been crying, but I thought it best to take no notice, and she made no effort to detain me. The next evening they were married, and started for St. Louis upon the late night train, on their way to New Orleans where Guy had some matters to settle before going North. And—we have never seen her—since!"

Rachel's forced quiet gave way, and she cried softly; and, though Miss Gardiner's calm, sympathetic face gave no sign of the curiosity she felt to know the conclusion of their history, Mr. Lysson let his wife's grief have its way, and gravely told the last there was to tell concerning the tragedy which, after being enveloped in impenetrable mystery for more than a year, had again suddenly stirred the current of their lives.

"Immediately they breakfasted, the morning of their arrival in St. Louis, Guy went out to attend to some business that would detain him until dinner-time, and left Elise to rest, as they had spent the night in journeying, and she was thoroughly in need of quiet and sleep after the noise and tiresomeness of carriages and cars. Soon after his departure a letter came, by post, to Mrs. Elise P. Chandor, and a servant delivered it to her in person. When Guy returned Elise was not in the hotel; nor have her husband and friends had the slightest clew to her since that morning, April 22d, over fifteen months ago."

CHAPTER IV.

AT HOME AND AT VASSAR.

THOUGH the greater portion of their lives had been spent in Chicago, one of the gayest and most dissolute of American cities, Rachel and Elise Wallbridge had been as strictly reared as if brought up under the ancient and Puritan regime of a New England home.

Mr. Wallbridge had come from the sternest of Puritan stock. He was devoted to business, unbending in will, and severe in his Christianity; a man of brains and conscience rather than a man of heart. Somewhat late in life he had married the rather giddy daughter of a well-to-do New Yorker. But he was not the man to be changed in any mental or moral degree by wedlock.

Mrs. Wallbridge soon learned that she must conform her life and views entirely to her husband's, and speedily settled into a recluse, a dyspeptic, and a devotee; the latter two conditions often being the accompaniments one of the other. Chronic invalidism and religious fanaticism developed a naturally peevish and fretful disposition, and under this and her bigoted ideas of duty and self-denial, she hid all show of tenderness and heartfelt emotion. And while she took scrupulous care of her

daughters' physical and spiritual well-being, she entirely repressed and neglected their emotional and æsthetic natures.

The Wallbridges lived in a handsome house, finely situated and comfortably furnished, but without any traces of elegance or luxury. They affected no style, and the plainest living and costuming was insisted upon by Mr. Wallbridge. Nor was this because he was niggardly concerning the wealth he had accumulated; he gave large sums in charities—even in charities that were never published; he spared no expense in educating his daughters, and their love for music—their chief recreation and comfort—was indulged to any monetary extent; but he believed that money expended on fashion, show, or worldly amusements was money unrighteously used; and he allowed no parties nor gayeties in his house, neither did he countenance any by letting his daughters attend them.

Rachel, inheriting much of her father's unyielding will, made no secret of her utter antagonism to his views; but Elise was of quite a different disposition. Clinging and affectionate, but excessively shy and sensitive, hers was a nature to develop naturally only in an atmosphere of boundless love and tenderest sympathy. Year by year, she became reticent and self-contained, submissively obeying all commands and accepting all beliefs she was told were right, without a word of dissent or an expression that betrayed her own mind and heart. Her home-influences, especially the temperament of her mother, tended to repel rather than to invite her confidence; and so, used to living within herself, and bending in outward observances to any strong will that came in contact with her own, while she cherished no firm inward faith, Elise Wallbridge lacked all those safe-guards that are present with most girls when surrounded by temptation.

Rachel Wallbridge was nineteen when she came home at the end of her third school year, and found the little sister she had left a child grown a rarely graceful young woman.

"Why, Elise, pet, you change so each year I get dazed, and scarcely can realize it is you. And what a beauty you are getting to be, fairy. Mamma, here are four kisses, one for each quarter year I have been away. I hope you are well, and how is papa?"

"Your father is very well, Rachel; he always is; but I am a martyr to ill-health, as you well know. I try not to complain; it is my cross, and I am resigned to bear it. Elise, go order some luncheon for Rachel; it is too long for her to wait until dinner."

As Elise vanished from the room, Mrs. Wallbridge resumed:

"I am surprised, Rachel, at your want of judgment in telling your sister she is beautiful; you will only make her vain, and vanity is a grievous sin."

"Nonsense, mamma; instead of making girls vain it often gives them a proper pride and self-respect to tell them of their merits and let them know that their friends notice and admire them. Elise nor I will ever be spoiled through any too much praise we have received at home."

"I have endeavored to do my duty by you, according to my light," said Mrs. Wallbridge, severely. "I am sure you cannot complain that you have lacked excellent Christian and moral training. This life is of little account, and my desire has been to fit you for the life to come."

"Oh, that is all very well, mamma," returned Rachel, calmly, but with knitted brows, "if you choose to believe it; but most young people will be so perverse as to take a little interest in this present life! And since Elise and I are of the wicked generation who desire to be happy while inhabiting this terrestrial globe, we could have dispensed with quite so much religious training. I cannot honestly say that I am greatly the better for it, and as for Elise, the child's nature is so frozen, that no one knows what underlies the submissive surface of her life. I only hope that the excessive care you have bestowed upon one side of our natures, and the utter neglect with which you have treated the other, will not result in any evil to Elise which will call for bitter repentance."

Surprised at this treason to tradition and parental wisdom, Mrs. Wallbridge expressed that surprise in her usual fretful way; but she was a person with too supreme a belief in the infallibility of her own theories and acts to long remember this reproachful outbreak. So that when a year later, Elise—a dreamy, flower-fair girl—went from the chill atmosphere of her Chicago home to lead her unprotected life in a world of strangers, it is doubtful whether

mother or sister recalled Rachel's prophetic words.

Elise Wallbridge's first room-mate at college was Blanche Lorrimer, a beautiful blonde girl of seventeen.

"I hope we shall get on nicely together, and like each other immensely," was her avowal to the little Western girl, during the first half-hour they spent alone together.

"I am sure I shall not find that difficult," answered Elise, glancing shyly but admiringly at her older and stouter companion.

"Why, you little flatterer! What pretty compliments you pay! Do you really believe that you can tolerate my presence and even like me, Miss Wallbridge?"

"Why not?" said Elise, smiling. "They are all strangers to me here, and you seem very nice. Why should we not be friends? I am sure," she added, hesitatingly, "one could not help admiring you."

Blanche crossed the room and stole her arm about Elise's waist, and stood looking out upon the lovely surroundings of their new home and chatting confidentially with her upon topics of mutual interest until they felt quite acquainted and satisfied with each other. Elise was passionately fond of the beautiful; and though it had been a repressed sensibility it had become so potent a power in her nature that it could influence her more surely than any religious doctrine or moral law; unfortunately this trait, like all the best ones of her character, was wholly uncultured and ungoverned. However, in its effect upon her liking for Blanche Lorrimer, it seemed likely to do her little harm. Miss Lorrimer, though fashionable and worldly, was a fair sample of a self-respecting, honorable American girl. But it was that Blanche was beautiful—startlingly beautiful—tall and stately, with a mother-of-pearl complexion—all milky whiteness and rosy flushes—eyes like the deep-blue sky when it smiles forth from storm-clouds that have hidden it and a mass of vividly-golden hair—that she made so easy a conquest of Elise's preferences.

With Miss Lorrimer Elise felt more at ease than with any young lady she had known, excepting her sister Rachel. She was conscious that in her room-mate she had found an associate who would neither exact nor repel her confidence, and who would thrust upon her no views, as views that she must confess to as right and as her own. And though the friendship that ripened between the two was not at all of the confidential kind that had so endeared to each other Rachel Wallbridge and Agnes Gardiner, they, nevertheless, liked each other's society, and were deemed somewhat exclusive by the other collegians.

CHAPTER V.

THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS, AND A NEW YEAR.

It was nearly the Christmas holidays, and late in the December afternoon. The shades were down in their pretty room, and the gas flung a cheerful glare of light over the tapestry carpet, the cottage piano, ivies that clambered up the borders of the lace curtains, walls hung with pictures, and little tables piled with ornaments and books. Elise sat writing—upon an open portfolio, while Blanche read a letter. Presently Miss Lorrimer pushed the letter back into its envelope, tossed it into a handsome satin-wood desk, and interrupted her companion with a startling proposition.

"Elise, after you finish your writing, I want you to pack your trunk and get ready to go home with me, to-morrow, for the holidays."

"Go home with you? What would papa and mamma say?"

"Never mind what they would say, for it is too late to write and get their decision, and you must make your own. Do you care to go?"

"I should enjoy it very much. I have dreaded to stay here alone."

"Then that decides it. I have invited you, you care to go, and accept my invitation, as you have a perfect right to do. I will arrange all the rest."

The next night found Elise and Miss Lorrimer in a handsome brown-stone mansion, just west of Fifth avenue, upon a fashionable street in New York, receiving the greetings of an elegant lady, a faded likeness of the beautiful Blanche.

"My darling, I am so glad to see you! and this is your friend? I am delighted that you have consented to be our guest, Miss Wallbridge, and I hope we shall be able to make you happy while with us."

"Thank you; I am sure you will," said Elise, with one of her dainty blushes.

"Miss Wallbridge will have the room next yours, Blanche, and my maid will help you both to dress for dinner. Alan will dine with us."

"Who is Alan?" asked Elise, a trifle nervously, as the girls ascended the broad stairway.

"He is Mr. Alan Torrence. His mother and Mr. Van Alst—my uncle by marriage, and my guardian—were sister and brother."

"And shall we meet your guardian, too?"

"Oh, no; he is in Europe, with my cousin Gertrude, visiting his father, who is very old. Gertrude is delicate, and she is being treated by some celebrated German physicians. My other cousin, who lives with us, Issalene Sanfrey, you will almost know, you have so often heard me speak of her. We are a dreadfully mixed up set of relations, but you may get us straightened out after a time," laughed Blanche.

Miss Lorrimer knew well how to lighten her fair beauty into the most dazzling charmfulness, and for this was given to affecting black costumes; but to-night she came down to dinner in a dress of pale pink, relieved here and there by a touch of black velvet, with wide bands of polished black onyx snugly encircling her white throat and bare arms, and a jet of aigrette shining in her golden hair.

Beside her, Elise Wallbridge looked such a timid little birdling, with her dreamy brown eyes, and her shy, sweet face, as delicate in feature and coloring as the wild anemone when first it dares the caresses of April winds and then faintly blushes at their tumultuous kisses. She wore a dress cut high at the throat, with long sleeves, and plainly made; but it was of silk of that indescribable shade which is neither slate, nor drab, nor gray, nor lavender, but partakes of the color of each, with a faint rosy gleam warming its sedateness; and it was relieved by a belt ribbon, and a cluster of loops at the throat, of rich, deep pink. Her rippling fair brown hair was combed to show the entire shape of the pretty head, and caught at her neck with a bow of the bright ribbon, whence it fell to her shoulders in a curling mass.

After all, Elise looked very sweet, and every inch an exquisite little lady as she walked into the beautiful parlors and heard her hostess say: "Miss Wallbridge—Mr. Torrence."

The girl glanced shyly but gracefully up to acknowledge the introduction; and, as she bowed, there came a look of such rapt, intense admiration into her face as could not fail to flatter the man who was its object, and that sent a thrill of hot jealousy and hatred through the little brunette who stood near him, awaiting her turn to be presented to her cousin's guest.

"I am delighted to meet Miss Wallbridge," Mr. Torrence said, his fine voice and marvelous eyes intensifying the polite speech.

"And I am very pleased at being able to know so many of Blanche's friends; and it is all so nice and unexpected!"

"Our family is not entirely represented yet; here is Issalene," said Miss Lorrimer, introducing her small, dark-faced cousin with a courtesy of mock ceremoniousness.

"I feel as if we were acquainted, already, Miss Wallbridge," Issalene Sanfrey said, coming forward; and two little hands met in as seemingly a friendly clasp as if the owner of one had not already decided in her heart that she and the fair Western girl should be mortal enemies.

"Since I am the only gentleman admitted to the delight of dining here to-night, Miss Wallbridge, my aunt has conferred upon me the distinguished honor of taking you down to dinner."

Elise put her tiny hand upon her escort's proffered arm, and answered, prettily:

"It is very kind of Mrs. Lorrimer to me," with such admiration of Alan all the while shining in her soft eyes, that he could but choose to bend his splendid face toward her and murmur, softly:

"And to me, also! I assure you, I never was happier in my life!"

"What a little idiot!" wrathfully and mentally exclaimed Issalene Sanfrey, of Elise, walking just back of her and Alan. "But Alan never would fall in love with a girl who admired him in such a shamefully open manner!"

Though but fifteen, this little passionate Cuban girl possessed a woman's soul, and was, in truth, a mistress of artifice, and in her knowledge of the world and fashionable conventionalities a sage compared with Elise, who knew almost nothing of society, and had never been taught to analyze or even fully understand her own emotions, much less to control and disguise them.

With chat, badinage, and plans for crowding

all possible enjoyment into the Christmas vacations, Elise's first evening in this new gay world passed almost like a sweet dream. But later in the evening Alan remarked to Blanche:

"And will your friend join in all your proposed amusements? She seems an uninitiated, artless little thing."

"Oh, she has been brought up a regular little Puritan! But she has few personal scruples concerning engaging in gayety, I imagine. At all events she is so yielding that she will acquiesce in all our plans, and enjoy the novelty."

"Good-night, Miss Wallbridge," Alan said, then crossing to Elise: "I am coming to take you young ladies to drive to-morrow morning."

The girl glanced up, but did not speak.

"Your face tells me you are glad," he said, bending over her and speaking low. "You pay me a great compliment. I wish I could thank you enough. Good-night, again, and the pleasantest dreams to you. And now, vouchsafe to me one more glance of those sweet, truthful eyes."

Flushing to an exquisite hue, Elise raised her innocent eyes, momentarily, to the handsome ones above her, and then let them shyly droop, quite unconscious that she had looked into the eyes of the man who was to influence her future life, for its all of good or evil.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LITTLE PURITAN.

WHEN the young ladies awoke the next morning they found that a heavy snow had fallen during the night. Indeed, it was still snowing when they gathered in the pretty breakfast-room, where Mrs. Lorrimer awaited them, seated before a blazing grate fire, her feet upon a hassock, reading the morning paper, from which she glanced to greet them cheerily.

"Good-morning, young ladies. I hope you rested well, my dear?" to Elise.

"Oh, very; thank you!"

"And we're quite ready for breakfast, mamma, so please put aside your paper. You know the proverbial appetites of boarding-school girls must be thoroughly appeased when they are at home."

"Well, I hope yours will be this morning," said Mrs. Lorrimer, smiling, as in answer to the bell she touched a servant brought in chocolate, and muffins, and savory steaks of venison smoking in the midst of quivering ruby mounds of currant-jelly, and crisp potatoes, and golden omelette; "for Alan will be here at eleven, to take you all for a sleigh-ride."

"How glorious!" exclaimed Issalene.

"And it is ten o'clock now," said Blanche.

"Mamma, you do not mean to say that Alan has been here before ten o'clock! What could have aroused him to such unwonted energy?"

"The prospect of a sleigh-ride with three young ladies! Is not that enough?" asked Issalene.

"He is not given to crucifying his love of ease for any woman," said Blanche, dryly, who was fond enough, in her way, of Alan; but not at all oblivious to his faults.

"I am sure you need not call him indolent. He is no more so than any wealthy young society man," cried Issalene, a trifle hotly.

"It is you who have called him that, my dear."

"And you forget that Miss Wallbridge is a new-comer," continued Issalene. "Perhaps she is the attraction."

Blanche turned toward her mother smiling; it was so ridiculous to think of little Elise being an attraction to handsome, courted Alan Torrence. But, Elise was not smiling; she had caught the look that had been in Issalene's eyes as she uttered those last words, and it had thrilled her with fear and a surety that under Miss Sanfrey's seeming friendliness was a nature not quite as pleasant. She could not know that the young Cuban hated every woman who won a smile from Alan Torrence; that she had loved him with an impetuous passion—a passion that not one of the family, not Alan himself, had suspected—since, as a little home-sick child, grieving for the Southern home and fond parents she had left—she had come among her Northern relatives, to receive her education.

"Alan sent a note, my dears," said Mrs. Lorrimer. "He says you are to wrap up well. It is a cold snow, promising to last some days."

"So much the better," said Blanche, "we may have sleighing all the holidays."

The girls hastened to their rooms from the breakfast-table, and were soon arrayed in thick costumes and abundant furs. Issalene chose to hide her dusky hair and wrap her throat in a

fluffy shawl of scarlet wool, from which bright frame-work her brilliant dark face gleamed like a witching portrait of some Gipsy maid; and Blanche followed suit by using a downy white wrap, with dainty blue ribbons adorning it in defiance of the crystals falling thick outside. Elise wore a boa and hat of seal-skin, the rich dark brown setting off her shy, little fair face; but Blanche made her take a soft white burnoose, to throw over head and ears in case the storm did not soon cease, or the ride prove a very cold one. They reached the lower hallway just as the sleigh was drawn up to the door, and four prancing horses stamped down the soft snow and shook a shower of music from their glittering bells.

"I shall bring them home in time for dinner and the theater," cried Alan.

"And ask Mr. Arslan and Mr. Jaffrey to dine with us," returned Mrs. Lorrimer, as she watched the merry party getting their places in the sleigh.

Before Elise had half-decided which gentleman was Mr. Jaffrey and which Mr. Arslan, so gay and rapid had been the greeting and introductions, she found herself by Alan Torrence's side, upon the center seat of the sleigh and almost buried under a pile of furry robes. The horses swung round upon Fifth avenue, and in an instant more they were flying through the white city to a clear sweet chorus of bells, with ringing echoes floating far up and down the avenue and along many a side street, and a cloud of crystals whirling wildly about.

But, what was the wind and the snow to three gay girls and three gallant cavaliers, not one of whom had ever been called upon to buffet a storm save for pleasure, nor had ever known a real sorrow upon the pathway of life? Elise, certainly, never gave a thought to the rude blasts that caused her cheeks to bloom ruddily, nor to the fine cutting flakes that flew in her face and powdered whitely her furs. She scarcely heeded Blanche's entreaty that she would wrap herself in the burnoose; but Alan did it for her, in his graceful, tender fashion, bringing his face so near to hers, as he wound the wrap about her shoulders, that she could feel his warm breath flutter against her cheek; at which her pulses throbbed so hotly that she could scarcely answer his next words without a telltale tremor in her voice.

That ride—dashing through the park, up the wide boulevard, and along the road to Yonkers—was to Elise a season of ecstasy. Issalene with her escort was in front of them, Blanche and Mr. Jaffrey back; Alan and Elise were left quite to themselves, and never once gave thought of aught but each other.

Alan Torrence had received a superior education, was a fastidious reader and a brilliant conversationalist; moreover, he was a thorough man of the world, versed in its intrigues, conversant with human nature; an *insouciant*, irreligious man, but polished and fatally tender in his manners toward women. And this man, who had been courted by many belles and worshiped by a score of older women, whose passion he had flamed while it amused him, and mocked at when it wearied him, was the prince who was to awaken the sleeping soul of this Western maiden.

He pointed out to her the finest landscapes; his words made pictures of a bit of broken fence or a dilapidated cottage; he talked of books, and poems, and paintings, and made Eliza talk of Chicago, of Vassar, of her music, her studies, herself. He discovered the charmed entrance to her dream-life, he sympathized with her romance, played upon her passionate love of beauty; in fact, bared the hitherto sealed book of her fancies and passion, and made himself her nature's master.

Not that Alan accomplished all this during that one drive; but when Elise's tarry in the gay life he helped to make for her was ended, he knew that she was—in soul and love—completely his; he knew, too, that if he had yet ever known love, he loved the little Puritan.

And the "beginning of the end" commenced under storm-filled skies, in a gorgeous sleigh, being rapidly drawn toward Yonkers, where the party were to enjoy a "regular sleigh-ride dinner." The ladies, for all the excitement and fun of a drive in a snow-storm, were quite ready to luxuriate in the cosy warmth of the hotel parlor. By the time they had put off their wraps and arranged their toilets, the gentlemen joined them, and Issalene commenced a lively waltz, to which Blanche and her escort were speedily dancing.

"Will not you favor me, Miss Wallbridge?" asked Alan.

"Oh, no, please," Elise answered, shrinking

back. "I have never danced except occasionally with some school-girl."

"And am I to be treated thus cavalierly because I'm not a school-girl?" laughed Alan. "You are too much of a fairy not to waltz nicely, whether you have danced often or seldom. I assure you I know. Come and try."

And Elise could not resist the gentle pressure of the pleader's firm hand, nor the eyes that said so much more than his lips. She gave herself up to his arms—to an unnecessarily close clasp—and found waltzing with Alan Torrence was an added drop in the draught of bliss he was holding to her lips.

With change of partners, and change of musicians, the dancing continued until a waiter summoned the party to a well-laid dinner in a small private parlor, to which the hungry riders did ample justice. It was four o'clock when the party left Yonkers—the storm was over and the day ending in a gorgeous sunset.

"Think! this is Christmas Eve!" cried Issalene. "How are we to spend it?"

"At the Fifth Avenue; I have a box engaged," answered Torrence. "Do you like the theater?" he asked, turning to Elise.

"I have never been."

"Little Puritan!" he said, lightly, recalling Miss Lorrimer's words.

Elise's soft eyes threw a swift glance upward, despite the caressing tone of his voice.

He answered her look:

"It was a pet name, if you will pardon my presumption in daring to say so. I was thinking how sweet and frank you were, and how delightful your confession was, for it affords me the opportunity to open the doors of untried delights to you."

"Then you think I will go?" said Elise, with a pretty touch of archness.

"I am sure you will. You are too kind willfully to make me unhappy."

Elise blushed and smiled and drooped her pretty face.

While Blanche Lorrimer, and even Issalene Sanfrey, were wholly used to such compliments and could accept them with brilliant *repartee*, Elise Wallbridge could only sit and flush and tremble under the all they meant to her. Ah! this Christmas-tide she was to drink deeply of the cup of love, little dreaming how deadly was the draught.

The days fled—each crowded with some new excitement—from Christmas Eve to the night after New Year, the time for farewells. On the morrow Blanche and Elise would return to Vassar, and a brilliant, informal little party had gathered to spend the evening with them.

The latter part of it found Alan Torrence and Elise in the quiet of the library.

"Suppose we say our good-byes here," he said; "it will be so much nicer than in the publicity of a depot to-morrow. You will not forget me after you are gone away?"

"Forget you, Mr. Torrence!" Elise answered, with a gasp that was almost a sob. "Oh! I could not."

"Thank you for that assurance, little one. And now you will give me one kiss, to remember when you have said good-by?"

The girl drew hurriedly back.

"Oh! no!"

"Not one, birdie? Not one?"

"No! No!"

"Tell me why, you little Puritan," he said, laughing at her distress.

"Because—" then Elise burst into tears, and Alan took her in his arms.

"Because you love me, you know that you do! and shall I tell you a secret—a secret that only we two may share yet awhile?" he whispered. "I love you!" and he gave her scores of kisses instead of the one for which he had begged.

Alan's secret was quite safe with Elise Wallbridge. She would sooner have thought of cutting off her hand than of writing to either of her parents of her love; even to Rachel she could not have confessed an emotion that so thrilled her soul. And when the summer vacation came, and Elise, en route to Chicago, spent one night with the Lorrimeres and again met her lover, no one suspected her attachment for Alan save the jealous little Cuban.

That evening Alan took Blanche and Elise to a concert, but Issalene was still in the parlors when they returned.

"Issalene," he said, "will you please to play a waltz? I want to see if Miss Wallbridge has profited by the lessons I gave her last winter."

Issalene took her seat at the piano, and Blanche threw herself into an easy-chair. Alan and Elise whirled dreamily to the music,

his splendid face bent very near to hers, and his lips whispering from under his handsome mustache what called a startled look into her soft brown eyes and intense flames of color into her cheeks. It seemed that they would never tire of their delicious pastime, and at last Issalene ceased playing.

"Thanks, Issa! Have I let you tire yourself? Miss Wallbridge, you dance admirably: but you are warm; come to the window."

They stood some minutes within the shadow of the lace curtains, softly talking, while Issalene passionately longed to know what they were saying.

Blanche was asleep, and the Cuban girl crept softly toward the window, in time to hear Alan's last words as he put aside the lace.

"Remember, you have pledged your honor to do as I wish."

The next morning Alan and Blanche went with Miss Wallbridge to the Jersey City depot, and saw her safely started on her journey to Chicago. As they drove homeward, Alan mentioned, casually, that he thought of taking a run out of town for a day or two.

That night he walked into a hotel in Philadelphia.

"You received my telegram, Howton?" he asked of the clerk.

"Yes, Mr. Torrence; we sent a private carriage for the lady, and she has the handsomest suit of rooms in the hotel."

"Thanks; then I know the room. All right." He hastened to an elegant parlor, softly opened and closed the door; and was greeted with a frightened little cry.

"Elise, darling!"

"Oh, Alan!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE THREAD FOLLOWED.

THE second night of Agnes Gardiner's visit in New York was an undisturbed one. She slept soundly and awakened late upon Wednesday morning; and as she made her toilet her thoughts were busily engaged with the story she had heard the previous evening. In their school days, her chum had frequently spoken of Elise, and Agnes knew well how devotedly Rachel loved her little sister.

What had become of this sister? What influence had worked subtly and surely in the heart of the timid, sensitive girl to render her morbid, weary of life, careless of any fate, at seventeen? Had she wronged her husband or been wronged by him?—For Agnes was not at all prepared to accept any man as immaculate, merely upon hearsay evidence, and this Guy Chandor might not have been wholly blameless, she thought.—Had she committed some great crime, or been the victim of one? Had she left Guy Chandor for some other lover's sake or because existence had become unbearable? Was she alive or dead?

But to none of these questions could Miss Gardiner find an answer. She even could not frame a particular theory of her own concerning the case. And despite the utter lack of superstition in her nature, as she put the mutilated envelope into her pocket, and went down to her breakfast, she fell to wondering why it had fallen to her lot to restore to Elise's friends and husband a possible clew to the girl's fate.

Rachel and Agnes had agreed to spend the morning in attending to some trifling shopping, and Miss Gardiner had hardly finished her morning meal before she was joined by the Lyssons.

"If Miss Agnes will trust me with the important document now in her possession," said Eric, "I will not detain you ladies, but make a report of my researches to you at luncheon."

"Very well, we will meet you here at one o'clock," proposed Agnes. "I must leave town by the afternoon express, and am anxious to know, before I start, whether this bit of paper will prove of any avail in tracing Mrs. Chandor's whereabouts."

"Then you believe she is alive?" questioned Rachel, eagerly.

"Do not you?" retorted Agnes, as quickly.

"Why, we have thought sometimes that perhaps she was so unhappy she took her life; or at least I think so. Of course Guy will not believe that she was really unhappy and unwilling to marry him."

"What is Mr. Chandor's opinion concerning this mystery?" inquired Miss Gardiner.

"It is very hard for a young bridegroom to know what to think concerning such a case; but he seems to cling to the belief that in some way she was beguiled into going out and then abducted for her jewels," answered Mr. Lysson.

"Yes, there was the letter," said Agnes. "If she had been killed, or had put an end to her own life, it seems to me almost impossible that no clew to the fact should have been discovered, while her movements and whereabouts if living could easily be concealed. But I should think it much more likely that she went away with some person, than that she was forcibly carried away."

"Agnes!" cried Rachel, in mingled anger and reproach, "you surely do not think that Elise voluntarily eloped! And who could have been in St. Louis that she knew? This letter was mailed there."

"Rachel, dear, it seems to me that so young and yielding a girl was just the person to become a victim to a man's intrigues. If she had loved, and her lover had been false to her, and then, manlike, capriciously coveted his prize just when it was lost to him, what easier than for him to follow her, and coax, frighten, or deceive a timid girl into submitting to his will?"

"This is not like a man's hand," said Rachel, her eyes upon the envelope.

"It is a disguised hand, probably, my dear," said Mr. Lysson.

"Well, we must be going, Rachel. Let us hope that Mr. Lysson will have learned something of importance by the time we return."

"What immediate steps did Mr. Chandor take to discover Elise?" she continued, as with Rachel, she entered the carriage to go on their round of errands.

"He had the hotel searched, and the police and a detective notified, and sent to father and to us to know if we had written her. He visited the railways, and telegraphed descriptions of her to all principal towns. Indeed he did everything, then and since, that could be done to obtain information and conceal the matter from unpleasant publicity. He, nor father, nor Elise, had any known enemies, and we knew perfectly all her acquaintances."

"What papers do you think she burned upon her wedding-night? Might she not have had some love affair East?"

"We learned all that we could from Vassar; but her room-mate for the second year was very slightly acquainted with her. We wrote to Miss Lorrimer, who had been in Europe during the early part of that year; Elise spent her first Christmas holidays with her. But she had never known of Elise receiving attentions from any gentleman, nor communicating with any one but her own family."

"It is all very strange," said Agnes, thoughtfully, as they alighted at Arnold's.

At luncheon, Mr. Lysson announced that he thought the torn envelope had afforded him a possible clew to Elise's whereabouts. He had made a list of the persons who had occupied that particular room, for the last sixteen months. Concerning the antecedents of some he had already satisfied himself, and crossed the names from the list; others he had still to investigate; but, from the clerk, he had received one description, and some news, that seemed to warrant his making further search into the case.

Early in June, a lady bearing the name of Mrs. E. P. Stanford, came here from Washington, to meet her husband who expected to arrive in New York from Europe the same day with her. He was a steamer late, and the lady occupied that room until his arrival, when they took a larger apartment and remained here for three or four weeks. The gentleman was young, handsome, and apparently wealthy; and the lady very small and fair, and had light-brown curly hair, and scarcely left her room until her husband came, having all her meals served there. You see the initials of the lady's name and the description of her are suggestive of Elise."

"And what has become of her?" asked Rachel, excitedly.

"That is for me to find out, my dear. The gentleman told the clerk that they intended spending the summer in town, but desired to live in great privacy. He thinks they took a furnished house."

"But how are you to find them out in one day, Eric?" Rachel asked, despondingly.

"A directory will not aid you," said Agnes. "And they are more likely to have obtained the house by advertisement than through an agent."

"So I have thought; and acting upon a suggestion made by the clerk, I have already set at work agents, who are searching the respectable parts of town, in districts, to learn, if possible, through a physician who may have attended this Mrs. Stanford, where they are living. And if we learn nothing to-day, Rachel, we will remain over for a Saturday steamer, or to-day

week. We will not leave New York until we have done all within our power to find who was the possessor of this envelope and what has become of that person."

"Have no other persons had that room between Mrs. Stanford's occupancy of it and mine?" inquired Agnes.

"Yes, several persons, but all gentlemen, as you will see," said Mr. Lysson, handing her his list.

Miss Gardiner's eyes ran rapidly down the page.

"Carl Van Alst!" she exclaimed.

"Some one that you know?" asked Rachel.

"Yes, a friend of mine, and a guest at Wilde Manor."

"Then I suppose we may cross his name off the list, as one who could have no possible connection with Elise," said Mr. Lysson.

"Of course!" said Agnes. "He spent most of his childhood, and considerable of his later life in Europe, where he was married and lost his wife."

"Evidently Mr. Carl Van Alst is a subject fraught with interest to Miss Agnes," Eric said, laughing.

"Yes," said Agnes, calmly superior to any teasing, "I am very much interested in him."

"Agnes! I'm so glad! Why did you not tell us before?" cried Rachel.

"Tell you what?"

"About yourself and Mr. Van Alst!"

"There is nothing to tell, except what I have told you!"

"Oh!" said Rachel, disappointedly. "But that means considerable, coming from you. I shall soon be expecting further news."

"Great expectations occasionally have a downfall," laughed Agnes; and yet—she seemed to see Carl Van Alst's beautiful eyes looking into hers, and hear the subtle, tender intonations of his voice as he talked with her—and felt her calm cool blood grow warmer as she thought of the meaning words he must speak soon. But she resolutely banished the beautiful vision. "Will you tell me, Mr. Lysson, why you think one of these latest occupants of No. 22 may not have been more likely to have left the envelope in the drawer than a person who had the room over two months ago? Of course, the envelope, itself, has been in some one's possession for many months; but it does not seem to me that it could have been lying in that drawer long. Would not one of the maids have thrown it out?"

"I have three reasons for thinking the lady left it. In cleaning the rooms of an establishment like this, the servants would not be as particular, as private servants, to clean the rubbish from every nook. They might clean out a drawer full of waste, while a few stray articles would be left for weeks. Then gentlemen, occupying the room transiently, would not bother much with bureau-drawers—very likely would not open them at all. And, lastly, if you look carefully at the envelope, you will see that the torn end has been twice narrowly creased over, to protect the opening, as if some small article had been carried in it; a use to which a woman would be much more likely to devote an envelope than a man."

"Very ingenious arguments," laughed Miss Gardiner. "It would be quite amusing if your theory concerning the ways of women should prove altogether a libel."

"Mr. Lysson? A card, sir; the gentleman would like to see you immediately, sir."

Eric excused himself, and presently returned with a hopeful countenance.

"The Stanfords are found!" he said.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. STANFORD.

"ARE you sure they are the same, Eric?" asked Rachel.

"As sure as I can be, my dear, until I see them."

"And when will you do that?"

"I think we had better drive there immediately after luncheon. Miss Agnes, will you accompany us?"

"No, thanks; you will have to excuse me: I have still some business to attend to and my sachel to pack. If Mr. Lysson will be so kind as to order a carriage for me I had better make arrangements to meet you at the Grand Central Depot, and hear further developments and bid you good-by there."

"And if we should be detained?" queried Rachel.

"You must write me immediately; but I fervently hope that you may not be, as I shall exist in a perfect fever of excitement until I know the results of your search."

So, as Miss Gardiner had promised to be at Wilde Manor that night, it was agreed that the Lyssons should prosecute their inquiries concerning the Stanfords, while Agnes completed her business in town, and that the friends should meet at Forty-second street in time to allow for a brief conversation before the departure of the train which was to take Agnes back to the hospitable mansion she was visiting.

Rachel and Eric were speedily driven to a pleasant house in West—street, where they hoped to find—ah, they hardly dared to own to their own hearts *who or what*? Now that for a little time they were unrestrained by the presence of a third party, or the relief of any occupation, however trivial, their hopes, and fears, and excitement seemed intensified a hundred-fold. Was Mrs. E. P. Stanford identical with Mrs. E. P. Chandor? If so, who was the man she called husband? And when and where had she met him? And by what means had he induced her to leave home, friends and bridegroom?

By the time the carriage stopped at No. 137 Rachel's cheeks were alternately flushed and pallid with expectation.

"Shall you ask for her, or for him?" she questioned of Eric.

"For Mr. Stanford, because I can waive sending him any name or card."

But Mr. Stanford was not at home, and the waitress did not think Mrs. Stanford would see the visitors.

"Her health is very delicate, sir; and she won't scarcely see nobody; though to be sure there's not many as comes to see her. So unless you be very great friends of hers it's not much use to take her the card."

"You might try," said Eric, pleasantly; "she may desire to see us. Stay! I will write her a line."

Under Mr. and Mrs. Eric Lysson he wrote:

"Implore of Mrs. E. P. Stanford to grant them a brief interview, on a subject of momentous importance to them."

The visitors were ushered into the parlor, which Rachel paced in the most intense and undisguised impatience and excitement. "In delicate health." "Won't see nobody." "Not many as comes to see her." Had these sentences referred to *Elise Chandor*? Was her sister really under the same roof with her, once more? And what sorrows did the servant's awkward sentences foreshadow? Such were the thoughts flitting wildly through Mrs. Lysson's mind, and that her husband made no effort to check, knowing full well that only the *dénouement* of their search, whatever it might be, could calm the feverish anxiety that made tumult in his wife's heart.

Presently the servant returned.

"Mrs. Stanford says you're to walk up into her *boodure*," she said, murdering her French with perfect equanimity.

Eric and Rachel followed with quickened pulses to a beautiful room upon the next floor. It was odorous with quantities of exquisite flowers; upon a table stood a silver epergne heaped with luxurious fruit of every clime; pictures, books, *bric-brac*—ornaments in crystal, silver, enamel, bronze—were scattered profusely everywhere, a cottage-piano occupied one corner, and in another was a wicker cradle, draped in the most delicious hue of rose-pink silk, to correspond with the hangings of the room, and the Moquet carpet strewn thickly with blushing rose-buds.

"Was that why the hotel-clerk suggested that you try to find out the Stanfords through their physician?" asked Rachel, glancing significantly toward the beautiful, tiny couch.

"Yes; he—"

There was the opening of a door. Rachel uttered a little cry, and sprung up with outstretched hands. Then she sunk back into her chair, mute and colorless. Even Mr. Lysson with difficulty preserved perfect control of himself at this moment when all their hopes and speculations were put to the test.

The lady who had entered the room was not Elise Chandor, but an utter stranger.

As she stood regarding these people who had claimed an interview with her—a slight, little creature, draped in a costly trailing robe of lace and ribbons—it was easy to see how a casual description of her might answer to one of Elise. In stature she was very like; and her complexion was daintily fair, and her hair—that was caught back from her face by a jeweled clasp, falling down her shoulders in a loose mass—was light-brown and curly: but it had more of a glittering golden tinge than Elise's; and her eyes were of that deep blue that seems

to deepen at times to black; and there was surprise, wonderment, curiosity, depicted in her face, but none of Elise's shy, shrinking grace. Indeed, though she looked weary and sad, and her eyes were dark-circled, as if with pain or weeping, there was a perfectly self-contained air about her; even a suspicion of amusement lurked about her pretty mouth, as she slowly advanced a step or so nearer the strangers.

"This is Mrs. Stanford, I presume," said Mr. Lysson, who was standing.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Stanford. Won't you sit down? You have something to say to me? I cannot imagine what it should be." And she regarded him with a comic air of curiosity.

"Not as much as Mrs. Lysson and I had hoped; for we were so foolish as to believe that you might prove to be a lost friend of ours."

"I? How funny!" said the little lady; and her face brightened and lost some of its weary look, as if even the novelty of this call was an eventful relief to her ordinary life.

"But you may be able to help us to find this friend," continued Eric.

Mrs. Stanford raised her eyebrows in disbelief, and shrugged her little shoulders. Altogether the action impressed Rachel as being a trifle too demonstrative.

"You occupied for a few days, in June last, room twenty-two, at — Hotel, on Union Square. Afterward an envelope was found in that room, addressed to Mrs. *Elise P. Chandor*."

"Oh, yes, I know; I threw it there—in one of the bureau drawers, I think. Is Mrs. Chandor your lost friend?"

"Yes."

"Then I can tell you nothing about her."

"Yet the envelope was in your possession?"

"Oh, a stranger gave it to me! I was coming from Washington in a drawing-room car, and I think he got on at Baltimore or Philadelphia. My collar came unpinned, and the pin stuck in my throat; and when I went to fix it, I pulled at a string of little carved gold beads, and broke the elastic, and they fell all over the floor. I had worn them since I was a little child, and wanted to save them. The gentleman helped me gather them up; and he pulled a letter out of that envelope and put the beads in it as we found them. I asked if I might keep them right in it, because it was easy to fold over the end of it and carry them in my pocket, so he gave it to me. When I reached the hotel and strung them, I threw the envelope in the drawer and left it there."

"Then you know nothing whatever of the lady whose name was upon the envelope?"

"Of course not; only it was funny that her name should have been Elise P. My name is Elise Paula, only I always go by the name of Paula."

"My sister's name is Elise Prentice," said Rachel, speaking for the first time.

"Oh, is Mrs. Chandor your sister?" queried the young girl.

"Yes."

"And she is lost? How could she get lost?" Mrs. Stanford asked, in the most interested and childlike manner.

"That is what we hardly know," Mr. Lysson answered for Rachel. "She was young and not unlike yourself; indeed, the description given me of you was what led us to hope that you might be identical with Elise. She married a Mr. Guy Chandor—"

"Guy Chandor!" cried Mrs. Stanford, with a violent start.

"Yes; do you know the gentleman?"

"Oh, no; but I have heard the name; it is rather an odd one; and what did you say became of her?"

"She went as far as St. Louis on her wedding trip, and then disappeared and has not been heard of since."

"Poor Mr. Chandor!" said the young lady, pitifully, the shadow of her own sorrow returning to her face. "And he does not know what became of his wife?"

"No, nor do any of her friends. You can now imagine how anxiously we traced you, when we surmised that the envelope directed to her had been in your possession."

"Yes; and how sad that I know nothing about it! Do you think the gentleman who gave it to me knows?"

"It seems almost impossible that he should not; otherwise how came he by the envelope and the letter you say he withdrew from it? Can you describe or identify the gentleman?"

"No; only that he was very handsome—ah! so handsome! And had the sweetest smile, and voice, and such nice manners. He had no luggage and bought New York papers—and when

we got to Jersey City, he wanted to escort me, he said New York was such a large city for a lady to go about in alone. But Clyde had made all arrangements, and told me what to do, and I am used to traveling around, only not in this part of the country."

"Then this is not your home?"

"No. I had no home," she said, with naive freedom, "until I married Clyde. Then we lived in several cities until he had to go to Europe; when he came back I met him here. We shall stay here until we can go to Clyde's home—our home—in France. Clyde is there now."

"And he has left you all alone?" said Rachel, in surprise.

"Yes," said the girl, her cheeks flaming suddenly, and her eyes darkening angrily. "He cannot help it! His ugly old father will die before long, and then he will be his own master; but now he would get disinherited if he were to say he had married a ballad-singer from a variety troupe! But, my Clyde loves me very much! He is sorry enough to leave me and baby!" Here a flood of tears succeeded the anger. "He has only been gone two weeks and it seems years! But we shall be happy some day!" she added, with a sob.

"God grant it," said Rachel, solemnly, crossing the room and kissing the tiny forlorn little woman.

Presently Mrs. Stanford had dried her eyes.

"I am very sorry that I cannot tell you more about that gentleman," she said. "But I'll tell you what I have, if you think it would be of any use to you; a paper-covered novel upon which he wrote the name of the hotel where I was going and where it was situated, so that I could not get wrong. Shall I give you that?"

"If you would be so kind," said Mr. Lysson, "it might help us to identify the man."

Mrs. Stanford passed into the next room, where a nurse in white cap and apron was pacing to and fro with a baby in her arms; she stopped to caress the infant, and soon returned with the book.

"I will tear off this cover and you can take it with you. The gentleman had dark eyes, and brown hair, and a brown beard; and I don't think he was a very large or small man; perhaps, about like you. He looked and dressed a little like a foreigner, but he had no accent, and I couldn't tell whether he was most like a Frenchman or an Englishman. I'm sorry that I don't know anything more about him. It is so sad about Mr. Chandor and his bride; worse than about Clyde and I. For, though Clyde has to go away from me so much, he knows that I'm always here waiting for him, and we love each other dearly. So that's something to be happy about, if I am so lonely."

"Poor little girl!" said Mrs. Lysson, as tenderly as if she had been speaking to Elise. "I wish I was going to be in town and I would come and see you sometimes."

"Would you? You are real kind. I told Clyde when he married me, that every one would despise his wife because she'd been on the stage. But he said that if I was good enough to be his wife every one should think so some day!"

"Only be true to your husband and yourself, Mrs. Stanford, and you will come out all right," said Eric, cheerily. "And we thank you for your kindness in seeing us."

"Oh, it's nothing!"

"If Mr. Guy Chandor should call on you, some time," said Eric, suddenly, "would you mind telling him just what you have told us?"

"Certainly not."

CHAPTER IX.

"LOVE BEGINS TO SICKEN AND DECAY."

THE second floor of a quiet little house in Philadelphia, consisted of a suit of rooms handsome as costly and tasteful appointments could make them. The parlor, the elegant boudoir, and the private bath-room, were marvels of elegance compared with the old-fashioned and Quakerish simplicity which marked the other apartments of the house. But then there was no more connection between the different suits of rooms than between their occupants.

Mrs. Smith, a precise old Quaker widow, and her elderly, precise maiden daughter, owned the house, and to eke out their small income had leased their second floor to a young married couple—a shy little flower-fair woman and a bold, dark-eyed, handsome man.

After these people had lived a year within this quiet dwelling, Miss Smith remarked to her mother that she regretted that they had given a two-years' lease to the party.

"Why, 'Becca?" the old lady asked, placidly.

"They have ever paid us the rent promptly,

and thou, thyself, sayest what a gentle little woman is Mrs. Torrence; and the man is mostly away; and I am sure thee hast never complained that the waiter from the hotel made dirt upon the stairs, when he brings the meals."

"No, it's not the dirt, mother, nor any trouble. It is that the husband is so seldom here. I can but think there must be something wrong about him."

"Nay, nay, 'Becca, thou shouldst not think evil of thy neighbors."

"But it's hard not to, mother, and Mrs. Torrence mopes and grieves so when he is away, and he is now oftener and longer away. I declare I would like to know more about them."

"Seek not to know others' affairs, until they need thy help, my daughter. The little woman told me this morning, when I met her upon the stairs and she stopped to ask after my health, that she expected her husband home to-night."

"Home!" Pale-tinted walls with gilded cornices, pale Moquet carpets, trailed over with garlands of flowers as delicately blue and as faintly pink as forget-me-nots and the woody arbutus, pale silken hangings of the inner hue of a sea-shell, and the color of turquoises, satin furniture to match in gilded framework, frosty laces, and dainty pictures, and gleaming statuettes, garnished these rooms called—"home." But if "home is where the heart is," those rooms were growing less and less a home to Alan Torrence and Elise.

The girl's heart was always with Alan; and he was now, as Miss Smith had remarked, often and long away from her; for his affection for her was already growing cold.

A man professedly irreligious and unscrupulously worldly, accustomed to denying himself no caprice that promised him passing gratification, Alan Torrence had indulged to the full his fancied love for the pretty little Puritan. He had bound Elise to himself with a tie that she was powerless to break, only to keep her in seclusion, while he lived another life, quite apart from hers, daring not to betray their alliance to the world.

A great poet has written:

"Alas! the love of women! it is known
To be a lovely and a fearful thing."

And again:

"Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,
'Tis woman's whole existence."

And Elise was rapidly verifying these truths in her personal experience. She loved Alan Torrence with all the intensity and utter self-abandonment of a morbid, girlish nature like hers, fettered by no other strong ties of affection, and sustained by no fixed principles nor fervent faith; and this love, having one only object, and constituting the entire depth and circumference of her existence, was capable of suffering the most exquisite torture through the every outlet and inlet of its life.

From the first, she had unquestioningly submitted to Alan. He had said that in his own time—and as soon as practicable—he would introduce her among his friends as his wife. She, herself, would see that it would be impossible for her ever to approach her old life, and the friends she had deserted and deceived; but in the gay social circles of New York she should one day be the brightest star, though for the present they must live in strictest seclusion, and she must have no *confidante*, no correspondent, no friend, no acquaintance, even, but himself; for him she must sacrifice all things!

And Elise had wound her pretty arms about his neck, and nestled her curly head upon his bosom, and feasting her beauty-worshipping eyes upon Alan's handsome face, had told him that that was an easy sacrifice to make!

Ah! so it was then! Her whole existence was bound up in Alan's. He was her one source of happiness, and she desired none other; and gave never a thought to those who had cared for her from her infancy; those she had cruelly wronged. Indeed, of voluntarily revealing her history to her friends she had never dreamed. In their very midst, she had borne her secret without a thought of betraying it. How much less, now, could she confess to them all? Besides, what did they care whether or not she was happy, or what had become of her? she reasoned. They had all conspired to make her unhappy, even Rachel and Rachel was the only person who had ever been a real companion to her.

Her mother had only cared for her as an object at whom she could fret and moralize; and though she had kissed her father nightly, for years, that kiss had been but a cold form. She never remembered when he had caught her in his arms, and tumbled her curly hair, and wasted kisses on her little face. He had been no

more to her than any other grave, elderly man of business, save that she had been taught to call him father. And she had had no crowd of brothers and sisters to brighten her life and fill it with tender ties. Indeed, her home had all ways held too much of stern, rigid, religious discipline, and too little of mirth, and pursuit of the beautiful, and mercy, and love, and tender confidences, for Elise to think of it longingly and regretfully, in the first rapturous bliss of life with Alan.

For, at first, this life was one golden dream. She was surrounded with every beauty and luxury that could be crowded into her little home; night after night she went to theater, opera and concert; and through the summer days Alan improvised many a short delightful trip to spots famous for their scenery; and always, night and day, Alan's love was her fail-less fountain of bliss. But, as the months went by, Alan was with her less and less, and when he was absent she could get no enjoyment from her paintings nor her statuary, her music nor her books; her heart was not in them, unless he shared them with her, but mourned ceaselessly for its mate. Morning after morning, she took her lonely walk and idled away the weary days as best she could; night after night, she wept through weary hours. Then, sometimes, when the morning found her languid and feverish, her mind would wander dreamily back to such days in childhood, when her mother's face had worn a look of unwonted kindness and anxiety, and her hands had rested tenderly upon the little hot brow, and Rachel had stolen into the quiet room and kissed and petted her.

Poor little Elise! Only through terrible heart-bitterness, like many another erring soul, was she to learn that the paths of rectitude, however hard to follow, are the only paths of peace.

But Alan would come again—and with him joy. For him Elise was all sunshine and bright-heartedness; he had once told her, sternly, that he wished to hear no complaints: she must be happy, and trust in him; he knew best how to live his own life, and when she could share it all with him. And so, for Alan's sake, Elise concealed the fact that her heart was breaking; though if he had been loving, as a husband should have been, he would have seen in the depths of her brown eyes, and by every line of the fading beauty of her face, that he had garnered this girl's love but through it to render her life a horrible torture.

June had come, and a bright sweet day, and it was to bring Alan. Elise had not seen him since late in March, and she was almost wild with joy. She sung as she went to and fro in her rooms, making them as beautiful as possible, and sat at her piano to play joyous little trills of song. She ordered a store of flowers from the florist, and when the waiter brought her lunch she told him that he was to furnish the choicest of dinners for two. After luncheon she spent hours upon her bath and toilet; laving her throbbing brows and the bounding pulses at her slender wrists in fragrant washes, and robbing her tiny figure in blush-rose silk. No longer could she wear the pale blues and cool neutral hues that had so become her pink-and-white beauty but two short years ago. But the blushing pink lent a slight color to her white face, and over the exquisite draperies her fair hair poured a rippling flood. She bound it back with rosy ribbon, clasped milky pearls at throat and wrists, and seated herself at the window to watch for the coming of her Love.

CHAPTER X.

UNDECEIVED.

"Oh, Alan! Alan!"

A carriage had rolled up to the door of the little Quaker dwelling and Elise had flown down the steps to meet the traveler.

"My dear, was it necessary for you to come down here to meet me?" Alan asked, with some annoyance, withdrawing himself from her passionate clasp and leading the way to their own rooms.

"How could I wait a minute, Alan, when I had not seen you in two long, miserable months?"

"I suppose the months were the same length for both of us," he answered, indifferently, throwing himself into an easy-chair.

"If they had been, I think you would have come sooner!" Elise said, with quivering lips, wringing her hands in her efforts to control her heart-sickness.

"It is a pity I came now, if fault-finding is to be my only reception," Alan retorted, impatiently.

The little pink-robed form threw itself into

his arms, with wild hysteric sobs and laughter.

"A pity you came now, when I am dying! dying! dying to see you! Oh! do not be angry with me! Do you not know that I worship you? That I only live in your presence? Oh, Alan! love!"

With caresses Alan calmed the storm he had raised, and for a brief hour there was happiness. Then their dinner was brought, and Mr. Torrence ordered the waiter to be early with the breakfast, as he wished to take a morning train to New York. Elise dropped her fork, and extended her hands in mute, anguished supplication, her face blanched and her eyes wide-wild with pain.

"Well, well," corrected Alan, anxious to avoid a scene at that moment, "bring the breakfast at any hour you choose. Come to think, I will not go back in the morning."

While the waiter packed the debris of the dinner, Alan went to Elise's desk to write a note, and she stole to his side and sat there patient and sad. Pulling open a drawer to look for paper, the first article that met his eye was a letter addressed:

"MRS. ELISE P. CHANDOR,
"Southern Hotel,"
"City."

Elise had the previous day employed her time, as she often did, now, in reading the few notes and letters Alan had ever sent her; and this had been left uppermost.

"What consummate folly is this?" cried Alan, angrily. "This should have been destroyed long ago!"

"I could not bear to destroy a line of yours," said Elise, timidly.

"But I certainly do not suppose you were such an idiot as to keep this!" retorted Alan, putting the letter in his pocket and commencing his note.

When the communication was finished, and given to the waiter to post, and they were again alone, Elise dropped upon her knees before Alan's chair.

"Oh! Alan, you did not mean—you surely could not have meant—to return to New York in the morning?"

"Yes, I did; and I must go in the afternoon."

"So soon, darling? So soon?" pleaded Elise.

"Think! I have not seen you in two months, and you stay with me only one day!"

"I tell you, once for all, that I shall not come again, if I am to be found fault with," replied Alan, impatiently.

Elise dropped her face into her hands and sobbed quietly. Presently she lifted her tear-filled eyes and asked, piteously:

"Alan, do you not love me?"

"Of course I love you, Elise. The proofs of my love are all around you; and I shall come to see you as often as possible. But, I may as well tell you first as last, that you must expect me but seldom."

Elise looked at him with a strange, startled expression growing upon her face.

"Alan, are you never to take me to New York with you? Never to tell people that I am your wife? Are we never to live together all the time, for years and years, just as we did for a few happy months?"

"You know as well as I do that that is impossible!"

"But is it to be impossible always? A year ago you told me the time would soon come; yet the whole year is past and you still say it is impossible! Oh, Alan! if you do not let me live where you live, and be known as your wife—if you do not keep on loving me, I shall die!"

Alan Torrence pushed the girl from him, paced the floor a few moments, and then came back and placed her on his lap.

"Listen to me, Elise," he said gently, but firmly. "You know that I love you. I have told you so again and again. I repeat it now; but proclaim this fact to the world, and our connection to the world I cannot; for I have been married."

Elise looked into his face, now, with eyes and cheeks so scorching that no tears were left.

"But am I not your wife, Alan?"

"Yes, my darling, you and I know that you are my own dear little wife. But do you suppose the world would believe it, in the face of your history? And do you not know that on your own unsupported word, you are powerless to prove it?"

Elise's eyes still looked burningly into his; but her dry, parched lips could utter no sound, not even a moan. Alan went on:

"As long as you love me, and I love you, you shall stay here in this pretty little home, and my little love, and I will come often to see

you. Say, Elise, do you love your Alan yet? Will you keep this little haven always ready for him to find here rest and comfort, and bliss in your sweet presence?"

"Oh, Alan!" and the girl's hard, woeful voice rose almost to a scream. "What choice have I?—what choice have I? I live only for you. Without you, your presence, and your love, I should die! So I must stay! I must do anything you say—be anything you choose—since you are my world and my life!"

Alan Torrence had gained his point. He understood Elise's nature well enough, by this time, to be sure that, unlike most women, she would, even in the face of this confession, still yield to his power and dictation. Other women's affections would have lessened with this outrage put upon them; other women would have grown vengeful and asserted themselves against any such plans to keep their lives one long, disgraceful secret. But Alan knew that the sum and substance of Elise's life was her love for him; and though he had already grown tired of the girl's clinging passion, since he had burdened himself with her, he had no choice but to still play upon that love, and keep her in subjection to such of his wishes as would make her the least trouble to him.

Now that he had told her, of what he himself had long known, that he should never proclaim her as his wife, he relapsed into his old-time, most ardent and lover-like tenderness; and under his impassioned caresses, and burning love-words, Elise was faintly happy. Even at their parting, next day, for Alan's sake, she tried to hide her misery. But when he was gone, and she had watched the carriage down the street until she could no longer see it, nor even hear its clatter upon the pavement, she threw herself upon the floor, and buried her wan, white face among the delicate blossoms of the costly carpet and moaned:

"Alan! Alan! Oh, Alan!"
And God pity the woman who wails the name of lover or husband with such utter despair in her voice!

CHAPTER XI.

WILDE MANOR AND ITS GUESTS.

"WHAT success have you met with?—less than you hoped, I see by your faces," cried Miss Gardiner, as Rachel and Eric joined her at the Grand Central Depot.

Mrs. Lysson described the visit to Mrs. Stanford and the conversation that had ensued.

"And now," she concluded, "the hour has come when we must say good-by."

"What? You take to-morrow's steamer!" exclaimed Agnes.

"I think we shall," said Mr. Lysson. "There is so little clew to follow: we only know that a medium-sized man, with dark eyes, and brown hair and beard, and nice voice and manners, came from Baltimore or Philadelphia, to New York, in June, and gave to Mrs. Stanford that envelope. Hundreds of men would answer to such a description; but I shall write to Guy of all that has happened; and if he thinks it possible to trace the person, by means of plausibly-worded advertisements, he will probably stay a few weeks in New York upon his way to England. At present, Miss Agnes, I shall bequeath my mantle to you. Since you discovered the envelope I shall return it to you, and let you exercise your detective powers."

"Oh, no; please do not! I can assure you that any efforts of mine to do detective business would prove most ignominious failures; and neither at Wilde Manor nor at home will there be the slightest opportunity for me to learn anything concerning Elise. Besides, it seems to me that Mr. Chandor is the proper person to have this envelope."

"Under ordinary circumstances, Miss Agnes, I should disdain to confess to entertaining the smallest amount of superstition; but the manner in which you came to bring the envelope and its mystery again to light seems so peculiar that I must say I have a desire that you should retain possession of it, in the hope that through you may come some further discovery. I will give you this other bit of writing; you see they are not at all alike; and with your permission, send Guy a letter of introduction to you, that if he desires to prosecute further inquiries he may call and get those papers from you in person."

Agnes laughed; yet she felt some little womanly curiosity to see the young Englishman who had lost his bride under such mysterious circumstances.

"Very well; I will consent to become custodian, for the time being, of the documents in question; though I have no faith in your idea

that through me will come any further developments concerning this case."

Nevertheless Miss Gardiner put the papers away in her elegant portemonnaie; and as the train which was to bear her back to the gayeties of Wilde Manor moved slowly out of the depot, she wondered, idly, if Mr. Lysson's presentiment could possibly be true; and these papers in some way be connected with her own fate; and she destined to make further discoveries concerning them. Then she thought of Carl Van Alst, and Wilde Manor, and smiled at the improbability of the idea; and with her feet upon a hassock, and a new book open upon her lap, had quite banished such odd fancies, when the train slackened its speed at the river-side station where her journey terminated.

Carl Van Alst was upon the platform, and at just the right car to give Agnes his hand, with a look that said more of welcome than a score of words could have done; and the Wildes' phaeton, with its span of black ponies, waited near. So Carl was to drive her up to the manor, through the sweet-scented, dewy twilight, just as Agnes had imagined he would—for even the best regulated and most orthodox female heart will, occasionally, indulge in such idle dreamings.

"And what have you been doing at the Manor during my absence, Mr. Van Alst?" asked Agnes, when they were cosily ensconced, side by side, and he had given the ribbons to the fleet ponies.

"We have had croquet, and quoits, and shooting, and drives, and rides, and walks, as usual; but all have seemed utterly dull without you, Miss Agnes."

"Or, rather, Miss Rodwell and Marion Dare have been less entertaining than usual, and you, yourself, perhaps, afflicted with an attack of indigestion!"

"Not in the least!" retorted Carl; "that is an unknown malady to me; and the ladies were never more entertaining. By the way, we have had reinforcements since your departure. Quite a crowd of visitors arrived this morning, and Mrs. Wilde is in her element—though she is devoutly longing for the return of her viceroy. But even our charming hostess cannot have been as utterly unhappy during your absence as your humble servant."

"That is because she is sustained by the consciousness of duties to be performed. I have little charity for those people who have nothing to do but be unhappy, and indulge the feeling as a sort of luxury."

"You are merciless, Miss Agnes. Do you intend me to understand that you condemn my unhappiness?"

"I condemn you in no wise, and I do not believe you know what positive unhappiness is, and you have not told me who the new guests are?" answered Agnes, lightly.

Carl Van Alst's dark brows contracted troublously a moment, but he spoke, gayly:

"Have you forgotten the proverbial skeleton in every closet, that you feel so positive that I have never known unhappiness?"

"Yes; or, rather, I hoped you had been an exception," said Miss Gardiner, with a sudden charming gentleness and self-reproach.

"Oh, do not think it is that!" he cried, quickly, feeling by instinct that Agnes was thinking of his marriage. "I admired the cousin whom circumstances ordained should be my wife for so brief a season, but I did not love her; and I feel that fate was only kind to both of us in freeing us from the burden of a life-long mistake. No; I had never known love then!"

There was no misunderstanding the intent of this explanation nor the meaning that pervaded Mr. Van Alst's voice as he spoke that last sentence. But when he lightly changed the subject to that of the new guests, Agnes, for the first time, wondered if this man could be only playing at love. Her heart gave a sharp throb of pain for a moment, and then her perfect lips curled disdainfully at the thought of any man trifling with her, or of ever guessing that he had won her preference until he first avowed his own. For Agnes Gardiner, in her proud young womanhood and with her worldly training, was the last person, whether she married for interest or for love, to vulgarly let her motives be seen—to wear her heart upon her sleeve.

"There are Mr. De Lancy, a bachelor very old and very rich; my uncle and father-in-law, Mr. Frederick Van Alst; John Richmond, and a very insipid little Englishman, Willis Leonard by name."

"And the ladies?" queried Agnes.

"Mrs. Lorrimer, Miss Lorrimer, and Miss Sanfrey."

"Miss Lorrimer! Are you at all acquainted

with her? Is her name Blanche?" asked Miss Gardiner, with quick interest.

Carl Van Alst carefully scrutinized his companion's face while he seemed only to be watching the ponies, as he answered:

"I am acquainted with the family. During my first long stay in New York I used to visit there somewhat, and Miss Lorrimer's name is Blanche. May I ask if you are acquainted with her?"

"Not in the least—I never saw her until last evening; she was at Thomas's with a little brunette and a fine-looking elderly gentleman."

"My uncle and Issalene Sanfrey, doubtless; both young ladies are his wards. Were you attracted by Blanche's beauty? She is considered rather unusually beautiful."

"Yes, I thought her so; but her chief attraction to me is the fact that she was a school-chum of a young lady in whom I am greatly interested. I quite long to make Miss Lorrimer's acquaintance."

"And you will speedily have the opportunity," said Carl, giving the ponies a cut that sent them flying faster toward a possible discovery of a new clue to Elise Chandor's fate.

"I have not told you the latest sensation," he continued, as they neared the manor gates.

"Mrs. Wilde gives a lawn-party to-morrow, with afternoon tea, a dance, and supper after the ball. Besides the guests at the manor, all the best families about here are invited."

"Mrs. Wilde's first lawn-party of the season! It is sure to be pleasant; her parties always are."

"I shall enjoy it, if you promise me at least half a dozen dances; otherwise I shall be bored to death."

"You are most moderate in your demands! I will promise three—one lancers and two waltzes—and trust that you will survive."

"How cruel you are! Nevertheless, I receive smallest favors gratefully at your hands; and if you enjoy yourself, I shall find enjoyment in watching you. Do you know that acquaintance with you has added quite a new and blissful flavor to my life, Miss Agnes?"

"How could I know it? But I am sure it is a pleasant thing to learn. Is it because I enjoy myself?"

"It is because you are so thoroughly fresh and vigorous in mind and body. You afford a man such charming mental companionship and you fairly fascinate him with your capacity for purely physical happiness. It seems as if the mere bare fact of existence is enjoyment to you."

"I believe it is," laughed Agnes, "when the air is clear and I have had a pleasant ride!"

And she sprung from the phaeton upon the marble steps at Wilde Manor, where her hostess waited to welcome her, and carry her away to the delicious little dinner that was being served for her in the cosy little breakfast-room.

While she ate her dinner, Miss Gardiner's thoughts reverted to the subject that the proximity of the Lorrimer's kept vivid. These people had known Elise—had entertained her at their home during one of the gayest seasons of life in town. Might not Elise have formed some friendship there that had influenced her future?

True, Miss Lorrimer had written Rachel that she had known of no gentleman paying attentions to Elise, nor of Elise writing to any one but her own family. But how did they know that Miss Lorrimer was to be trusted? Might not Blanche, herself, feel in a degree responsible for some unfortunate acquaintance Elise had formed, and so deny all knowledge of it?

Agnes longed to question Miss Lorrimer, and the chance to do so was afforded her in a very few minutes after she had donned an evening dress and appeared in the drawing-room. The two ladies were introduced just as Miss Lorrimer had left the piano for a seat near the window.

"Will you not sit here?" Blanche asked, moving to one end of the little tete-a-tete. As Miss Gardiner accepted the seat, she added: "Is it not quite odd, Miss Gardiner, that we should meet again so soon?"

"After our two rencontres last evening?—yes; and I am particularly glad that it has happened so, for the lady friend who was with me recognized you as having been a room-mate of her sister at Vassar."

"You do not mean Elise Wallbridge?"

"Yes; the lady with me was Mrs. Lysson."

"Then you know Elise? You can tell me all about her—where she is?"

"No, I had hoped that, possibly, you could tell me."

The two young women regarded each other

silently for a moment, Agnes with steady, intent gaze, Blanche with glowing *hauteur*.

"I think," said Blanche, coolly, breaking the silence, "that you must have made some mistake regarding me."

"I think I have, and I ask your pardon," responded Miss Gardiner, gracefully. Already she was convinced that Blanche Lorrimer was innocent of any knowledge of her chum's fate. "I had only hoped that having been Elise's friend once, you had at some time become her *confidante*, and could help me to some knowledge of the secret of her life."

"The secret of her life—and you cannot tell me about her, nor where she is!" asked Blanche, wonderingly.

"I can tell you a little—if you care to know," and, briefly, Agnes related Elise's history, ending with her belief that Elise had been coerced into an elopement with some former lover.

"Poor little Elise! She was such a gentle little thing! I cannot understand it. Certainly she could not have been in love while I knew her!" Miss Lorrimer asserted, positively.

"The whole matter is enveloped in a dreadful mystery, and so painful a one that you will be so kind as to keep it an inviolable secret."

"Most certainly," said Blanche, gravely. And the two young ladies sauntered away, leaving a listener behind the lace draperies that had sheltered their seat, whose face was ablaze with furious hate and passion.

Issalene had stepped from the marble veranda into the bay-window, intending thus to enter the parlor, when the conversation being carried on, the other side of the curtains, arrested her steps, and riveted her attention so completely that she was quite oblivious of the fact that Carl Van Alst had followed, to speak with her, and stood just without the window-frame, puffing upon a cigar, and admiring her statuesque attitude.

"So that is what has become of her!" Issalene whispered, fiercely, as Agnes Gardiner concluded her story of Elise. "Could it have been Alan she ran away with? She certainly loved him—and he her! Her! an insipid little Puritan, instead of me! I wish I could kill them both, or rather discover their secret and proclaim it to the world!"

The little Cuban fairly hissed the last words between her tiny clenched teeth, and the man who heard them involuntarily recoiled from this exhibition of a girl's hot, vindictive hatred. He tossed away his cigar, and went quietly back along the veranda, to the brilliantly-lighted hallway.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAWN PARTY.

DINNER was served at noon, the day of the lawn party, and as Carl Van Alst and Miss Sanfrey happened, for a moment, side by side, the gentleman said, softly:

"Issalene, it is an eternity since I have seen you, to talk with you. Cannot you dress early to-day and take a walk with me around the Manor before the guests commence to arrive? And you must save me two or three nice dances for this evening."

The little Cuban raised her dark brows coquettishly and her scarlet lips curved to a glowing smile.

"Mr. Van Alst knows how delighted I shall be to comply with his requests. I will be in the rose-lined tent by four o'clock. How many hearts, here, shall I break by my appearance upon your arm?"

"I am afraid any such delightful pastime will be denied you, to-day," laughed Carl; "though when you have been here a week, and smiled like that upon all the gentlemen at the Manor, I may be able to give you a different answer," he added, gallantly, as they separated to take their places at table.

"Well, Blanche?" Issalene cried, a few hours later, appearing in her cousin's room.

"Well, what, Issalene?" asked Miss Lorrimer, dropping a novel and turning sleepily upon the lounge. "You did not come to tell me it is already four o'clock?"

"No, it's only a little after three; but I am tired of reading, and I could not sleep. I want to know what you intend wearing, and what you think of the people here?"

"I'm going to wear my pale-blue silk grenadine, with pink rose-buds; as for the people—what people?"

"Why, all of them; Mrs. Wilde and her son, and Miss Gardiner, and Miss Dare, and that little Rodwell, and the gentlemen."

"Mrs. Wilde is very pleasant, and a perfect hostess, just as mamma said she would be; and Mr. Wilde is as agreeable as his mother; as for Miss Gardiner, she is fine-looking, certainly, and seems a great favorite with the Wildes and Carl."

"Yes; and she is a coquette, and gives herself airs; I cannot bear her, nor that affectively little Rodwell thing, with all that flying hair!"

"Oh, you are sure to dislike some one!" said Blanche, lazily; "but I would wait until I knew people a little better before pronouncing such decided opinions concerning them. Miss Dare is a plain little body, but seems good-natured and sociable. She is Mrs. Wilde's niece, isn't she?"

"I believe so; and I'll tell you whom I hate—that horrid old man who sits next me at table."

"Mr. De Lancy! Oh, Issalene, and he was so devoted to you to-day, he did not half-eat his dinner; and he is prodigiously rich!" cried Blanche, teasingly.

"And prodigiously ugly! Disgusting old creature! I abhor old men—without wives!"

"Issalene, you have not been well educated, Mamma should have told you how much finer it is to be an old man's darling than a young man's slave," continued Miss Lorrimer, triflingly.

"She never would have made me believe it!" said Issalene, growing furious. "I never could love a man who was not young and handsome; but for love of him I would be a slave—anything! But an old man—bah! I'd die before I'd marry one!"

"Nonsense," laughed Blanche; "you do not know what you may do. And I would advise you to keep cool over all subjects in such weather as this."

Issalene went back to her own room, slamming the door after her.

"Marry an old man, indeed!" she cried, angrily, as she paced the floor. "No! I'll never marry but one man, and if I cannot have him, I'll kill myself! Oh, Alan! Alan!"

So, rashly and wildly, is youth given to promising, little dreaming what wonders time may work.

Presently Miss Sanfrey remembered her appointment with Carl Van Alst, and calmed her outburst of passion, and arrayed herself in a brilliant transparent costume of rose-color, and went down through the wide halls and airy parlors, trailing and brimming over with flowers, and out to the little tent upon the lawn, where Carl sat puffing upon a cigar.

"Oh, you are come," he said; "and how dazzling you are! I may keep on smoking, I presume. And how do you like Wilde Manor?"

"It is a lovely place, certainly," Issalene answered, as she took Mr. Van Alst's arm and strolled out along the broad, shaded walks—little dreaming what she was to hear.

Mrs. Wilde was upon the marble balcony receiving her guests, and Miss Gardiner was marshaling a party for croquet, when Carl came up with Issalene, the girl looking very bewitching after her walk, in her rosy draperies, with her eyes flashing and a brilliant bloom in each round dark cheek.

"You are just in time, Mr. Van Alst," said Agnes, "to complete this croquet-party. I am sure Miss Sanfrey will be your partner."

Miss Gardiner's violet eyes, cool and commanding and superior to that strange, triumphant glance with which Issalene stood regarding her, met the little brunette's a moment, in calm disdain, as she thus coolly assigned to the girl the very partner she coveted.

When Agnes had organized two croquet-parties and a rifle match, she still found quite enough to do to make Mrs. Wilde's *afternoon* in all ways a success. Marion Dare, Mrs. Wilde's niece, had spent many summers at the manor, and was obliging to every one, and sociable with the women, and helped the men to while away dull hours by mild flirtations, but she was in no wise born to rule and command, a gift quite native to Miss Gardiner; and so it had come about that Mrs. Wilde relied upon Agnes to help her do the honors of Wilde Manor through the weeks when it was crowded with visitors, and poor little Marion never thought of offering her humble aid. If she had, doubtless Mrs. Wilde would have said:

"Oh, no, dear; Agnes knows best about everything!" and Miss Gardiner would have smiled, and answered: "You are very kind, Marion; but really there is nothing you can do."

So Marion good-naturedly filled any place to which she was assigned, while Agnes moved hither and thither, her elegant lissom form draped in folds of glistening silvery tissue, with

heavy sash and knots of black velvet relieving it, and a few of her favorite pansies nestled in her reddish braids—great golden-lipped pansies, with jetty velvet centers—discernible, always, among the brilliant throng upon the lawn, as she found the coolest seats for the ladies, carried the fan to some heated croquet player, showed novices in the rifle match how to hold their ar-
 weapons, or sent a lazy cavalier to point out to some shy lady the beauties of the parterres and greenhouses—always cool, always commanding, always fascinating, with that air of blissful physical content about her that made more people than Carl Van Alst watch her with a reflex sense of restfulness and enjoyment.

The games passed off well, the gentlemen were kept up to their duty in the way of flirtations, the claret-lemonade in the great Indian punch-bowl upon the lawn was always of the requisite degree of iciness, the elder ladies found gallant gentlemen anxious—at the instigation of Miss Gardiner—to promenade with them, and cosy chairs in shady nooks reserved for them when they were tired, and so the time for tea came, and every one pronounced the afternoon "perfect!"

An hour and a half was idled away in the parlors and upon the broad marble balcony, where biscuits, tiny triangular sandwiches, delicate cakes and tea were served, while the twilight added witchery to the music of voice and piano, and intensified the romance of flirtations. Then the dining-room, improvised into a ball-room that was a perfect bower of greenery and bloom, lighted by scores of waxen tapers, was thrown open to the dancers. Chinese lanterns twinkled thickly about the lawn and veranda, over the parlors was flung a glare of light, music floated through all the mansion, and light feet tripped joyously to the soft measures of the waltz.

"Oh, Carl!" cried Issalene, after her first waltz with Mr. Van Alst, as they rested by an open window, "there is that little Rodwell making herself agreeable to uncle Frederick."

"That is because Henrion is not near. Where is he, I wonder?"

"Gone out with Miss Gardiner," said Issalene, scrutinizing her companion's face. "They left the room before we stopped waltzing. Oh, horrors! There comes that hideous Mr. De Lancy toward us! Take me away!"

"Probably he wanted to engage you for the next quadrille," laughed Carl, as he led Miss Sanfrey through the window upon the veranda, and so to a path among the lantern-lighted shrubbery; "it is cruel of you to deprive him of that pleasure!"

"Do you think I would dance with him? Why, it would make me shiver just to touch his hands!"

"What a shame that he should inspire you with such horror, when he has evidently been in love with your face from the first moment he looked upon it. Couldn't you manage to reciprocate, Issalene?"

"Reciprocate! Love him! When you know that I shall never love but one man!"

"And that man—Alan!"

"And that man Alan!" repeated Issalene after him, with low, intense voice.

"And if Alan should not love you?" Carl asked, half jestingly, his admiring liquid brown eyes looking straight down into the fiery black ones, that glanced up to him out of the dark flushed face.

"I should kill myself!" the little Cuban whispered, passionately. "But do you want to know what I would do first? I would kill him!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A VOW MADE AND BROKEN.

"HEAVENS! What a temper Issalene has!" Carl Van Alst said to himself, the morning after the lawn-party, his thoughts reverting to the events of the previous evening as he strolled around the manor, to get up an appetite for the late breakfast for which few of the visitors had yet appeared. "I wonder what she would do to a man who trifled with her? Not kill him, nor herself—girls seldom carry out such rash threats; but do him all the harm possible, I haven't a doubt. It would really be interesting to know for how much trouble her Cuban jealousy is already responsible. What a pretty little spit-fire she is, though! Most men would be proud to have such a girl in love with them; and how deliciously she confessed to her secret, when I asked her if she loved Alan! It is strange that a passion which has existed so long unsuspected I should have discovered so oddly at last."

And here Carl Van Alst's thoughts strayed to Agnes Gardiner, and his dark, liquid eyes grew

grave and wistful, wavering troubled lines formed themselves about his handsome mouth, and there came such a look upon his dusky, splendid face as must have made his guardian angel yearn pitifully to help the man decide for the right in the conflict between good and evil which thoughts of her had aroused in his mind.

Scores of times in this man's life he had played the game of love—sometimes, indeed, believing it was in truth; but one by one each fancy had wearied him, leaving him bored with life and satiated with passion. Even his brief marriage to his cousin, Gertrude Van Alst, while she was in Germany for her health, had held no romance for him. He had united the two branches of the Van Alst family at his grandfather's desire, but he had felt no further pangs of pity and regret when his young bride was laid in her foreign grave, than might have been entertained by any gentlemanly stranger over the death of a fair girl not yet out of her teens.

Immediately after Gertrude's death he came to America, and fitted up for himself a suit of rooms in New York with great magnificence; but until he had accepted Henrion Wilde's invitation to spend the summer at the manor, he had quite forsaken society and forsworn feminine associations. So unaccountable had these freaks seemed to those who had known him well during his previous periods of life in New York, that Carl had gained an immense amount of sympathy and admiration, from acquaintances who imagined him cherishing a sorrow which, in truth, he had never felt; but while surmises concerning his recluseness were wildly incorrect, none guessed the true cause, and many an anxious mamma hoped that by the next summer the wealthy young widower might return to the social gayeties of New York and be successfully courted by some one of her marriageable daughters.

But, all such hopes were destined to be disappointed.

Carl Van Alst went to Wilde Manor, and met Agnes Gardiner, and straightway fell in love with her. And then he knew, that all former loves had been mere passing fancies, but this passion for Agnes was the one grand passion of his life. Her intense lifefulness, her culture and accomplishments, her perfect tastes, her fascinating manner—so equally frank, graceful and dignified—her high-bred control of her emotions, her rare, charming beauty, and her proud morality, all appealed powerfully to Carl Van Alst's nature. The more unlike in character he found her to himself the more ardently he worshiped her; and it was the very exaltation of his love for her which had so far kept him from declaring it, and winning Miss Gardiner's delicious consent to become his wife.

Could he link this refined, proud, upright life to his own accursed one?

This was the question with which he was struggling this morning, when Miss Gardiner herself interrupted his meditations, and, briefly, the onward movement of her approaching fate.

As she came toward him in her floating lavender draperies, the morning sun burnishing to red-gold her luxurious hair and lighting up her calm, proud, colorless face, her lips smiling, and her wondrous violet eyes frankly looking her pleasure at meeting him, Carl Van Alst, as he touched her outstretched hand, registered in his soul, before High Heaven, an oath that he would never insult this splendid girl with an avowal of his love for her. He would quit Wilde Manor on the morrow, return to Europe, and so leave Agnes to forget him.

"So you, too, are getting up an appetite for breakfast," he said, as he turned to walk with her.

"Oh, no! My appetite is unimpaired; but I had a few minutes to spare, and thought I would walk down by the gate where there is a bed of pale-blue, almost lavender pansies. I want a cluster for my hair."

"May I walk there with you?"

"Certainly; if you will escort me immediately back to breakfast. Do you know what we are to do to-day?"

"No, but you are probably prepared to inform me."

"Going on a riding-party and a picnic; that is, those who care to ride will do so, and carriages will take the others. We start as soon after ten as possible, for our destination will be Silent Lake, and that is nearly a fifteen-mile ride."

"And how are we to be entertained when we get there?"

"Oh, in the usual picnic ways. There will be two tents, in which to rest, and in which the ladies can change their habits for costumes more compatible with croquet-playing and fern-

gathering. Then there will be archery and rifle matches, lunches, walks, flirtations, and all the accompaniments of an orthodox picnic. Of course you will ride?"

"If I may act as your escort."

"I have promised Mr. Wilde that he may perform that duty; but you will ride, nevertheless?"

"I presume I shall," he said, laughing, but not very contentedly, as he bent over the bed of pansies, to gather her a cluster of her pets.

The picnic certainly was a success. Not one of the party at Wilde Manor remained at home, and several couples from the neighborhood, in acceptance of some early messages dispatched by Mrs. Wilde, joined the gay group of equestrians.

The route to Silent Lake was a delightful one, over a shady, hilly road, with outlooks upon fine scenery. The party on horseback headed the cavalcade, Henrion and Agnes leading. Flossy Rodwell was riding with John Richmond and was in anything but an enviable frame of mind, since her ambition was to be escorted by Carl Van Alst or Henrion Wilde; however, she was too inborn a flirt and actress not to do her prettiest to fascinate her escort. And another young lady was secretly disappointed that the heir of Wilde Manor had not chosen her society, and that was Blanche Lorrimer, who was riding with the little Englishman. Carl Van Alst escorted Issalene, and Marion Dare's lot had fallen in with that of a merry youth who was one of the Wildes' neighbors.

After the equestrians, came an open carriage containing the two married ladies and Mr. De Lancy and Mr. Van Alst; a huge wagon, crowded with conveniences, and luxuries, and servants, brought up the rear.

It was one o'clock when the tourists gathered at the lake; and with luncheon, games, and walks, the afternoon wore gayly and rapidly away; but the party were not to set out upon their return until eight o'clock, when they would have moonlight during part of their ride homeward.

Late in the afternoon Carl Van Alst missed Agnes from the party. He had seen little of her during the day; and as he had resolved to leave Wilde Manor the next morning, he would not deny himself one more walk with her. Having satisfied himself that she was not near the tents, he strolled into the deeper woodland in search of her, and shortly gained a clew to her wanderings—a wilted pansy among some trodden ferns; a moment more he was within sound of voices.

Just above him, upon a ledge of fern-thick, mossy rocks, where a little archway among the trees afforded a pretty, tiny look of the lake, sat Agnes, while Henrion Wilde stood near her, leaning against a tree, his face flushed and his whole bearing one of annoyance.

"Tell me one thing, Agnes. If you say that you love some other man, I shall know that there is no hope for me," Henrion was saying.

"You have no right to expect an answer to such an inquiry; but I do assure you, positively, that there is no hope of my ever giving you a different answer. Pray be friends, Henrion, and let us forget this whole matter, from this moment," answered Miss Gardiner, calmly.

"There is no choice for me but to forget," replied Mr. Wilde. "I shall never recur to it, and I hope we may not change our past attitude toward each other."

"There is no necessity for it," said Agnes, rising, and at that moment she saw Carl climbing the ledge, and a warm color swept momentarily across her pale face.

"I beg pardon," said Carl, appearing to just notice Henrion; "have I interrupted a *tete-a-tete*? Some one told me Miss Gardiner had gone to gather ferns, and I started in pursuit to assist her."

"Then I will leave her in your care," said Henrion, politely, and he swung himself over the ledge and retraced his steps toward the lake.

And in an instant more Carl Van Alst's passion had conquered the purer nature of his love for the woman who stood his graceful *vis-a-vis*.

He thirsted to know for his own, this prize which he had just seen denied to another, and his oath of the morning became a perjury as he gathered two fair hands in his own, and murmured softly and ardently:

"Agnes! Agnes! I love you!"

After that he was silent a moment, as his splendid brown eyes tried to read her unfathomable violet ones; but the answer they refused him, her warm, pulsing hands, and the quickened throbs of her snowy throat betrayed. He

drew her passionately toward him, and bound her with his arms, as he whispered:

"My queen, my beautiful love, you will be my wife?"

Agnes neither spoke nor made any effort to free herself from this close embrace, and he knew that he was answered, and her hair, and brow, and drooping eyelids he flooded with forceful kisses.

But this blissful and lover-like occupation was speedily interrupted by the shouting of Carl's name. He assisted Agnes down the ledge of rocks, and then a servant met them, bearing a telegram.

"It has just come, sir," said he, breathlessly. "James brought it as fast as he could ride."

Carl tore the envelope, and his face paled as he read the few lines, and crowded the paper into his pocket.

"I have troublesome business news here; I must leave the party immediately. Andrew, get my horse saddled as quickly as possible. I must catch the evening express, at the nearest station."

"Good-by, my beloved," he whispered, as the servant hurried before him, and they neared the lake. "I leave my soul with you. Good-by!"

"Good-by!" and Agnes Gardiner's scarlet lips yielded their first love-token to his.

CHAPTER XIV.

DESERTED.

THE summer sunlight was all shut out of the room where a woman lay beneath the rosy curtains of her bed, ghostly white and to all appearances unconscious.

Thus had she lain for hours, while a nurse had anxiously watched her, the doctor had often come and gone, and kindly faces had stolen up to the elegant couch, and peered cautiously within the silken draperies.

The doctor came again, and felt for the almost motionless pulse, and whispered softly with the nurse.

"She can scarcely live, I think," he said. "It is useless longer to delay sending for her husband. Have you any idea of his address?"

"No," said the woman; "but you might find it in her desk, only she keeps it locked and wears the key about her neck."

"You had better get it," said the doctor.

The nurse folded aside the dainty cambric puffs and embroidery above the sick woman's breast, and detached from about her throat a blue ribbon upon which hung a little key. It proved to be the key of the desk, and the doctor soon discovered the address he desired, and dispatched a telegram to New York. It ran thus:

"Your wife is dying. Come at once."

"ALFRED CARTER, M. D."

After the telegram was sent, there came a decided change for the better to the sick woman, and the doctor declared that the crisis was past.

Many hours later, when there came a quick ring at the door, the invalid started and turned feebly toward her nurse.

"Has any one sent for my husband? That was like his ring."

"Hush, my dear, hush! You must not talk, nor get excited. Even if he has come, you cannot see him unless you are very calm."

"But I will be calm—so calm."

"We will see, then," said the nurse, going to the outer room.

Miss Smith had admitted the new-comer.

"How is she?" he asked, rapidly, of the Quaker lady.

"Thy wife is better; the doctor says that she will now live! and thy baby seems a healthy little thing, though it did come sooner than thou and thy wife expected."

Alan Torrence regarded Miss Smith's placid, joyful face with a look of intense surprise, that was fast changing to one of fury.

"What is this you tell me?" he demanded, fiercely.

"That thy wife is better," said the unruffled Miss Smith.

"But about—"

"Thy babe? That is well and will live."

With a suppressed curse, Alan sprang up the stairway and into Elise's apartments. At the door the nurse met him.

"Hush," she said, "you must be very calm before you go in to see her."

"Calm! Is she not better? Is she not going to live?"

"Yes, yes; she's much better, but—"

With another muttered oath Alan passed into his wife's room.

"What does this mean, Elise?" he said, stop-

ping at the bedside, but not offering to kiss the thin face. "Why was I not told of this, long ago?"

"I have not seen you since early in June," said Elise, pitifully; "and I meant to write to you; but I did not think it would be so soon."

"Where is the child?" asked Alan, still without a caress for the young mother.

"There," said Elise, with a fond glance toward a tiny wicker cradle. "Our daughter, Alan—our little daughter!"

Alan went to the small couch and turned down the coverlet. A tiny, healthy, rosy infant slumbered there peacefully. He did not touch the child, only muttered:

"What a fool the girl was not to tell me!"

"Alan," asked Elise, in a whisper, when he spoke no word to her, "are you sorry that the baby has come?"

"Sorry is no name for it! I hope it will die! I have been a fool—an accursed fool!"

And with that he went out of the room and out of the house, and Elise was deserted.

After that it was useless for Elise to try to hide her secret from those about her. The nurse knew, the doctor knew, and the good Quaker ladies knew, that she was a wronged and deserted wife, if nothing more; but to none of them did she betray aught of her past history; only to Miss Smith, in an hour of weakness, she confessed her present trouble.

Utterly despairing and heart-sick, her recovery was very slow, and it was nearly twelve weeks before the doctor pronounced her able to take any out-of-door exercise. During this time, the old Quakeress and her daughter were very kind to the invalid, showing her many gentle attentions, even though Elise was well cared for by doctor and nurse; for though no word came from Alan, large remittances arrived monthly, and the girl was able to pay for every comfort and luxury.

During one of her tedious, invalid days Miss Smith found her crying in most wretched, heart-broken fashion.

"What is it, poor child?" asked Rebecca, gently.

"Oh, I am so lonely—so miserably lonely!"

"Where is thy wicked husband, that he is not here comforting thee?" asked the Quakeress, in righteous indignation.

"Alan is not wicked!" sobbed Elise; "but he is not my husband, and he cannot be here often."

"Not thy husband?" cried the maiden lady, for a moment giving way to virtuous horror.

"No! I thought he was; but he isn't, and I must not expect too much from him!" moaned the girl.

Rebecca looked down on the pale, worn face, that had lost all its fresh young beauty since first she had seen it, and could not believe that this youthful mother was utterly bad and sinful.

"Poor child! poor child!" she said, pityingly, sitting down by Elise's side, and stroking with her firm, cool hand the feverish, tear-stained face. "If thou knewest that he was not thy husband, thou shouldst not have stayed with him."

"Why not?" asked Elise, simply.

"Why not?" repeated Rebecca, wonderingly, unable to understand the almost heathenism of this girl whose early bringing up had been in so severe a religious atmosphere that those who had known her then had often called her a little Puritan. "Surely thou knowest that it is a great sin to live with him."

"No, it can't be a sin, for I love him," replied Elise, confidently.

"Yes; but it is a sin, a great sin, if thou art not his wife."

"But I thought I was his wife; and now that he has another wife, I love him just the same, and I should die without him; and what can I do, but as he tells me?"

"Hast thou no parents? Thou shouldst go back to them and leave this wicked man."

"Oh! no; I can't go back! I can't leave Alan!" for she would not believe that he had left her—had actually and finally deserted her; and she turned her head upon the pillow, and would talk no more, and Miss Smith went away, thinking her most hardened and ungodly.

Though Elise had said she could never go back, she dreamed often, now, of her home, and Rachel; and she called the baby Rachel—the baby that she cared for in a monotonous, matter-of-fact way, scarcely loving it, because Alan did not.

"She thought she was his wife?" said old Mrs. Smith, when Rebecca repeated her conversation with Elise. "Perhaps she is, and that vile man is deceiving her."

And the next time that Rebecca called on Elise, she said:

"How dost thou know that thou art not Mr. Torrence's wife? Hast thou no certificate, and canst thou not go to the preacher who married thee?"

"No," said Elise; "it was at night, and we went in a carriage quite a long distance into the country from Philadelphia. There was a paper, but Alan kept it. No, I cannot be his wife; for if I was, could he marry again? And he told me that he had got married. But I shall live, if he will only love me!" and then Miss Smith gave her up in despair.

CHAPTER XV.

WHO DID IT?

By mutual consent, it was arranged that Carl and Agnes should not make public their betrothal until they left Wilde Manor; and as they were to remain with Mrs. Wilde during most of September, there were nearly three weeks in which they could keep their idyl to themselves, as Mrs. Gardiner, to whom they had both written, was the only person whom they had admitted to their confidence. The month of October Agnes was to spend in her old home, but in November she and her mother would leave Meadow Grange and settle in town, when the wedding was to take place just before the holidays.

These were the arrangements that they completed during their early promenades in search of flowers, and quiet stolen half-hours of an evening. If Miss Gardiner's will alone had been consulted, she would have delayed the marriage until the spring. But Mr. Van Alst was so earnest in his entreaties that she would let it be as soon as possible that Agnes had yielded the point.

Now that Carl had decided to marry, he could not restrain his impatience to possess himself as speedily as possible of his wife. He longed to know the proud, calm Agnes for his own; to control her motives and movements; to be the very ruler of her existence; to fold her in his arms and rob her sweet mouth of kisses when he would; for even as his betrothed, and though he was sure that she gave him a precious treasure of hearty and honorable affection, she was so imperiously unapproachable, so choice of her favors, so queenly condescending in her yielding of them, that she intensified, day by day, the fierce love that she had awakened in Carl Van Alst's nature. To a man of his position, and immense wealth, accustomed to every sort of flattery, and to every sort of power—especially to infinite power among women—Agnes Gardiner, with her fascinating ways, her disdain of control, her serenely authoritative manner, and her undemonstrativeness, was the one woman who could not only compel his admiration but madly provoke him to become her master, and teach her to tremble at his touch and live upon his caresses. And this he vowed should come to pass.

Time went by swiftly at Wilde Manor, for the house was filled with guests, and something new in the way of amusement and pleasure was devised daily, in which Agnes was always the leading spirit. So many were the demands upon her attention and time that Carl was scarcely more with her than with any other guest, and it was not in the least remarkable that no one suspected their engagement. Indeed, Issalene Sanfroy was so often his companion that a casual observer might have thought that she was the honored object of his affections.

Issalene maintained her intense dislike for elderly Mr. De Lancy, though that gentleman continued apparently fascinated by her dark, Spanish beauty. Flossy Rodwell had given up all designs upon the money and person of Carl Van Alst, disdaining to shake her cloud of light hair, and waste the arch glances of her blue eyes, for the benefit of one who had shown himself so utterly impregnable to her conquests; and it was hard to tell whether she was spending most of her forces upon the heart of the heir of Wilde Manor, or that of the little Englishman. Certainly, in the former case, she had a rival in Blanche Lorrimer; for, from the hour that Agnes Gardiner had refused to marry him, Henrion had ceased to be impervious to Blanche's beauty; and it seemed safe to assert that, in due course of time, Miss Lorrimer would quite fill the place in his affections that he had imagined was only destined to hold the image of Agnes. As for Marion, good-natured, unselfish little Marion, she was compelled to take whatever attentions happened for the moment to fall to her lot; though, for a handsome, eminent man of sixty, Mr. Van Alst, senior,

showed considerable and very kindly interest in plain, sunny-tempered Miss Dare.

Thus matters drifted on at the manor; and through the waning August sunlight, and the brilliant September days, the warp and woof of more destinies than one were being woven to the ill or perfect end.

One morning, when the gentlemen were away and the young ladies, with the matrons, were gathered around a heap of costly old-fashioned dresses and finery, from which they were manufacturing some picturesque costumes for tableaux, a letter, postmarked Denver, and superscribed in a clear, bold, manly hand, was brought to Agnes. As just at that moment a brocaded robe was being fitted to Miss Rodwell, and Agnes's assistance was not needed, she withdrew to a window to peruse the note, which she correctly surmised was from Guy Chandor.

"MY DEAR MISS GARDINER:

"I am just in receipt of my brother-in-law's letter. I have decided, instead of going directly to Europe, to spend some weeks in New York, and make another effort to penetrate the mystery which for the last sixteen months has clouded my life. I shall avail myself of your kind permission to make your acquaintance, desiring to hear from you, in full, the circumstances which Eric was obliged to mention most briefly, and to obtain from you the specimens of penmanship which he says he has given to your care. I fervently hope they may prove of some avail in tracing the abductor of my wife. Will you do me the favor to send me a line saying where and when I can meet you? Immediately upon receipt of it, I shall leave Denver and arrive in New York within a week. If I do not hear from you before starting East, my address in town will be at the Fifth Avenue Hotel.

"Very respectfully yours,

"GUY CHANDOR."

"I am afraid your communication was not a very pleasant one," said Miss Lorrimer, a few minutes after Agnes had finished reading her letter, and the two young ladies, side by side, were deftly metamorphosing an ancient ball-dress into a Greek girl's costume; "you look so unwontedly serious."

"It was a letter from Mr. Chandor, the bridegroom whom Elise Wallbridge so mysteriously deserted."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Blanche, with interest.

"Then you know him?"

"Only through a letter introduction from Mr. Lysson. He is coming East."

"How I should like to see him," said Blanche.

"You may have the opportunity," responded Agnes; "for with Mrs. Wilde's permission I am going to ask him here to the meeting he desires."

"But I shall miss seeing him, for we leave in three days now."

"So soon? Our party will be entirely spoiled."

"You are very nice to say so; but I hope our departure will not plunge matters here into so sad a state as that. But I really do regret losing the opportunity of seeing Mr. Chandor. Of course you will tell him how oddly you came to discover the last trace of Elise?"

"Yes, and return to him the envelope. I do not remember whether I told you, but I have it as yet in my possession, together with another scrap of writing by a person whom we have reason to believe has been, or is, in some way connected with Elise. If you care to see them I will show them to you before you leave. Not that I suppose there is the slightest hope of your being able to recognize the writing as any you have ever seen in her possession."

"No, I am afraid there is none," replied Blanche, "but I should like to see that torn envelope."

"What do you think of this costume for an Indian princess?" said Issalene, suddenly, from behind them, leaning over Blanche's chair, her dusky hair shaken loose and a quantity of gold lace woven fantastically through it, her arms and shoulders nearly bare, and a gorgeously-striped silk training about her.

"I should think it would do very well," said Miss Gardiner; "or for a Gipsy queen, or for a Rebecca, with the addition of some jewels."

"Or the 'Bohemian Girl,'" added Issalene, "with this dress shortened. I'll run to my room and get necklace and bracelets and show you the effect."

A brilliant party gathered in Mrs. Wilde's drawing-rooms, to witness the tableaux that night, and the entertainment was voted a success; though the dancing, and the fine supper, may have had as much to do with that as the *impromptu* art spectacle. Certainly, two persons at Wilde Manor secretly decided that the whole matter of the tableaux was a brilliant one, since it had been the means of betraying into their hands some decidedly trump cards.

One of these persons was Flossy Rodwell. In stepping upon a newly-built balcony, back of the improvised stage, she made a misstep, and fell upon the gravel-walk, and fainted, in the moonlight, with only Henrion Wilde near. Knowing that she could not be much hurt, and not wishing to interrupt the tableau that was just being arranged within, Henrion simply raised the girl's head and shoulders within his arms, and wet his handkerchief upon the dewy grass and bathed her forehead. Almost instantly Miss Rodwell's eyes came open, and she comprehended the entire situation.

"It is you!" she said, softly. "Oh! I am so glad!" and she dropped her head most decidedly upon his breast and closed her eyes.

"You are not hurt?" he asked, anxiously.

"No, I think not," sighed Flossy, languidly; "only I am so faint. But, don't call any one; it will pass away in a moment, and I do not care to alarm them. Would you mind helping me to stand? I think I can stand, if you will be so kind as to let me rest on your arm a little."

So they stood—Henrion leaning against the balcony, and Flossy leaning against his shoulder, his arm about her waist, and her head drooping nearer and nearer his. Presently Miss Lorrimer stepped upon the balcony, from her part in the tableau, just as Flossy had hoped she would, and saw those two figures in the moonlight. She turned scornfully away, and Miss Flossy quickly recovered; but she had worked the mischief she desired. Miss Lorrimer was so chilling in her manners to Henrion Wilde, for the next two days, that he let her go away from the manor without making the proposal to her that he had intended; and Flossy was left evident possessor of the field.

But, if something unpleasant had happened to Miss Lorrimer that night, she was not the only person at Wilde Manor startled into serious annoyance.

Just before retiring, Miss Gardiner wrote a note to Guy Chandor, and then opened her portemonnaie, to take from it the writing she had promised to show Blanche; but the papers were no longer there.

Vainly Agnes searched every compartment of pocket-book and drawer; the torn envelope and the penciled scrap of leaf were unmistakably gone. But, where had they gone and through what agency? Not even in regard to her adventure with the envelope had Agnes been so seriously puzzled. She could not, and would not, believe that Blanche Lorrimer was in any way responsible for this theft, and who else in that house knew of Agnes's connection with Elise's history, or of her possession of these papers? And while Agnes failed to satisfy herself as to how and why these papers had disappeared, the fact remained that all clew to Elise's whereabouts was again lost.

CHAPTER XVI.

GUY CHANDOR.

"HAVE you heard that Mrs. Wilde expects a new guest to the manor, to-day?" asked Agnes, lightly, of Carl Van Alst at the breakfast-table, the day that she had appointed for Mr. Chandor's coming.

"No. Is it any one in whom I can possibly be interested?"

"You might be," suggested Mrs. Wilde, laughingly, "if you knew the secret of his coming."

"Why, is there a secret about it? I hate secrets; but I hope my hatred will not extend to the guest. You said it was a gentleman, did you not?"

"He is a Mr. Guy Chandor, of Denver."

"Guy Chandor! I beg your pardon for my carelessness, Miss Agnes, I hope I did not spill any coffee upon your dress. Mrs. Wilde, may I trouble you to send me another spoon?"

"Mrs. Wilde," said Flossy Rodwell, giving over her efforts to engage Henrion in any continuous conversation, "is this Mr. Chandor young, and unmarried? You really ought to be kind and tell us all about him."

"But as it happens that I can answer none of those questions, my dear, I shall have to refer you to Miss Gardiner."

"Oh, that's the secret, is it?" said Flossy, flipantly; "then of course he isn't married, and he is nice-looking! Isn't he, Miss Gardiner?"

"He is married, but, as I have never seen him, I cannot answer for his looks."

"Oh, there does seem to be a secret!" remarked Carl, with a slight trace of annoyance in his voice, that only Agnes detected.

"Hardly," said Miss Gardiner, calmly; "it is true, as Mrs. Wilde intimated, that he comes

here as my guest. He married the sister of my dearest friend and schoolmate; through that lady and her husband he has had an introduction to me, and, on his way to Europe, stops to see me on some business."

"How is it," asked Carl of Agnes, watching her attentively, when they had left the table, "that Mr. Chandor's wife does not accompany him?"

"I don't know," answered Agnes, hesitatingly, "that I have any right to canvass Mr. Chandor's affairs with a person who can have no possible connection with them. No," she added, lightly, "I had better not tell you."

"Oh, all right," laughed Carl; "I've not the slightest interest in being made acquainted with this stranger's affairs; but I hope that when you are Mrs. Van Alst you will refrain from mixing yourself up with other people's private business matters."

"When I am Mrs. Van Alst," returned Agnes, with perfect serenity, "Mr. Van Alst will find it quite unnecessary for him to make any suggestions to me, concerning my movements and conduct, as it is now."

"You are mistaken, my lady, if you so flatter yourself!" muttered Carl to himself as they parted with smiling courtesy.

It was just luncheon-time when Guy Chandor arrived at the manor, and he was almost immediately conducted in to that meal by Miss Gardiner; they were quite well acquainted and at their ease by the time he requested of her a private interview.

Despite Mrs. Wilde's gracious invitations, he maintained his intention of returning to the city by an afternoon train, so that soon after luncheon Agnes proposed a promenade along the shady manor walks while she related to him the circumstances which he was so anxious to hear.

"What a splendid girl she is!" Guy thought, as Miss Gardiner joined him upon the marble balcony, with a jaunty garden hat tied over her heavy braids. "I don't wonder that Eric was so enthusiastic in his description of her."

"I am afraid," commenced Agnes, seriously, as they sauntered down the shady walks, "that I have a great disappointment in store for you."

"You must know, since you have heard all of the sad affair which we are about to discuss, that I am not unused to disappointments by this time."

"Yes, indeed," answered Agnes, gently. "You must have suffered so terribly through disappointments and suspense, alone, that I almost dread to tell you that I am unable to fulfill Mr. Lysson's trust, and put into your hands the torn envelope, and the bit of paper which we hoped might prove aids to you in a further search for Mrs. Chandor."

"You have lost them?"

"Yes, and in the strangest manner," and Agnes related her discovery of the disappearance of the papers.

"Might you not have lost them at some time when using your portemonnaie?"

"It is hardly possible, since I have had occasion to use it but once, recently, and then I assured myself of their safety."

"What persons could have had any interest in abstracting them?"

"There is no one whom I can suspect," replied Agnes. "The only person who knew of their existence was Miss Blanche Lorrimer, who has been visiting here, and was Mrs. Chandor's chum for a year at Vassar."

"And you do not suspect her?"

"I cannot. I think she is a thoroughly honorable girl and was fond of Elise, and is greatly grieved concerning the mystery which enshrouds her. Certainly, she knows nothing whatever, that will afford a clew to Elise's present whereabouts."

"Well," said Mr. Chandor, thoughtfully, "I think I must make one more effort to unravel this mystery, even without the aid of the papers. Will you kindly detail to me your discovery of the envelope, and all that Rachel told you concerning Mrs. Stanford?"

Agnes gave Mr. Chandor a full account of her stay in New York, and the discovery that the Lyssons had made.

"I shall go to see Mrs. Stanford, probably tomorrow, and then I shall resort to advertising," Guy said, thoughtfully, when Agnes had told all that he wished to know. "Have you ever thought, Miss Gardiner," he questioned, suddenly, looking straight into her face, with the first real smile that she had seen upon his own—a smile that shot brilliant lights into his fine blue eyes and glorified his Saxon fair face, "that your connection with this mystery of mine has been a very strange one?"

Agnes marveled, for days afterward, that that smile, and those words had affected her with a strange thrill of mingled pain and pleasure, of foreboding and expectation. But she answered, calmly:

"Yes, but it ceases, now; and I am afraid without having been productive of any good."

"Perhaps it has to me," said Guy; "and I hope," he added, very softly and solemnly, "that through it no harm will ever come to you?"

"Oh, I am sure there will not," Agnes answered, smiling; though, strangely enough for her, she felt a trifle uncomfortable and nervous under the serious gaze of those slightly sad blue eyes.

They walked on silently for a time, then Mr. Chandor asked:

"Was Miss Lorrimer the only person here who was formerly acquainted with Elise?"

"No, there was Mrs. Lorrimer and a Miss Sanfrey; but they only met her through a short visit that she paid to Blanche. Neither of them knew anything of her history after she left Vassar, and Blanche promised not to reveal it."

"Well," said Guy, dismissing the subject with another of his rare smiles, "I am greatly your debtor for this conversation, and I should be pleased to know that our acquaintance was not to end here and now."

"It need not," replied Agnes, "if you will do me the honor of continuing it. I leave here in a few days, for my own home; and my mother and myself would be delighted to have you pay us a visit at Meadow Grange. It is in New Jersey, just a pleasant little ride from town."

"Thank you; but shall I not see you in town?"

"Not unless you delay your return to Europe as late as November. We take up our abode in New York during that month."

"I shall surely see you again, since I have your permission, though I cannot, just yet, say when or where. And now I must ask you to lead the way back to the house. I shall only have time to make my adieux and get my train."

"Then you will not be persuaded to stay?"

"No, thanks to you and your kind hostess just the same; but I feel that my first duty lies in New York," he answered, his face darkening.

Several persons were lounging on the veranda as Mr. Chandor and Miss Gardiner appeared, walking up the broad drive.

"Aren't they a splendid-looking couple?" asked Flossy Rodwell of Mr. Van Alst.

"Do you think so?" he returned, indifferently.

"Yes, indeed!" retorted Flossy, maliciously; "he is just the sort of man Miss Gardiner ought to marry."

"Perhaps Miss Gardiner is the best judge of the sort of man she ought to marry," said Carl, smilingly. And few persons could have guessed how, minute by minute, Carl Van Alst's bitter hatred was increasing toward the blonde gentleman who came slowly on by Miss Gardiner's side. And through all his future life, he remembered the picture they made when Guy said his last good-by—standing, with his golden head uncovered in the westerling sunlight, and Agnes by his side, upon the lower steps of the veranda, she smiling, and frankly laying her hand in his.

CHAPTER XVII.

"OF ONE THAT LOVED NOT WISELY BUT TOO WELL."

SLOWLY, very slowly, Elise recovered. Because she was so young, the doctor said; because God was cruel, and would not let her die, Elise thought.

And through those days of invalidism, what horrible mental torture, as well as physical weakness, the girl was forced to bear—waiting hour by hour, day by day, week by week, for some word from Alan, that never came. Never came, at least, until one cheerless day, late in November; and when Elise had read the bitter message, it seemed to her that suspense, heart-gnawing suspense, was nothing to its terrible revelations.

"ELISE,"—the letter ran—"you must know that I have ceased to love you, and that it would only be folly on my part, and continued cruelty to you, to continue to dance attendance upon you; so I shall not see you again! I have settled upon you in — Bank of Philadelphia, a sum sufficient to support you through life—if you will be a little economical and only draw the interest. Remember that it will be utterly impossible for you to make, or substantiate any claims against me; and neither letters nor attempts to see me will be of any avail in changing my plans. Unalterable secrecy is your safest course, if you wish to preserve yourself and child from a life of disgrace. A."

Now, indeed, Elise knew that her last hope had failed her. Alan had ceased to love her! For hours she lived and moved with that thought burning itself into her brain, with that one only gleam of consciousness about her. Then she began to think of death and life. She wished she was dead, yet she did not want to die. It seemed to her that there was nothing more to die for than to live for, unless she could be assured that death was an end of all things—that there was no life, no consciousness, no anything, beyond. But now came back to her, with strange force, words and teaching she had heard in childhood; and she shrunk from death as she did from life; though if Alan had been with her it seemed to her that she could have died easily; but without him she could do nothing—die nor live—she thought. But many and many a soul, in like bitter sorrow, has thought the same and yet lived on.

So it was with Elise. And with each day that she lived, the horror of her position, the intensity of her loneliness seemed to increase. Now that she had once known the joy of being loved and petted, caressed and protected, notwithstanding the bitter experience that had followed, she found that it was impossible to return to her old self-sufficient life. She longed for a companion, for friends. Many times a day her voice broke forth in a pitiful cry for "Alan!" And, by degrees, her heart went out, also, toward those others who were bound to her by ties of relationship; until, at last, she wrote a letter—an incoherent, heart-broken letter—to Rachel; saying that she was sick, and alone, and begging for her child's sake that her sister would come to her, or write to her, and tell her what she should do.

Even to Rachel she confessed none of her history, and to her parents she never thought of writing. If any one would be kind to her, Rachel would; if Rachel failed her, then all the world had failed her! For Elise was all unconscious of the mother-love that underlay Mrs. Wallbridge's fretful and bigoted external nature, and of the stern sense of justice and duty that would have led her grave father to do all that he could for this erring daughter.

And Rachel failed her! The days passed, but no letter came from Denver. Then Elise made one last resolve; since all the world was against her, she would seek to find Alan—despite his decree—seek to win from him some compassion. If sight of her was powerless to reawaken his old affection, and he refused to care for her, she would die—she cared not how, she could find some way!

So Miss Smith came into her room one day and found her packing.

"Surely thee is not going away?" she cried, in surprise.

"Yes, I am," said Elise.

"To thy friends? I hope thee is going to thy friends."

"I have no friends," said the girl, bitterly; "so we are going to New York, baby and I."

"Not to Mr. Torrence?"

"Yes; if he will not come here, we will at least be near him."

Miss Smith was silent. She had learned how useless it was to try to persuade this girl to reveal her past history, or go back to any friends she might once have had, or conquer her love for Alan. But now a new thought was working in the Quakeress's mind.

"My child," she said, "I have thought much of thy case; and I believe thee tells the truth about thy marriage to Mr. Torrence. If, as thou sayest, there was a ceremony performed, it is thy duty, to thyself and to thy babe, to prove it."

"But how can I prove it?" said Elise. "I have told you that it was in the country. I do not know the name of the place, nor the minister's name; and Alan kept the paper."

"But if it was near here, Philadelphia papers must be read there, and thee might advertise."

"I never thought of that," said Elise; "but what good would it do? Would it make Alan live with me again, and love me?"

Love for Alan was the mainspring of her life. Poor child! Hers was one of those natures where love takes deep root, and clinging to the object of its affection thence draws all its sustenance.

"What good would it do?" cried Miss Smith, energetically. "Why, thee mayst be able to prove thy honor, and thy baby's honor, in spite of thy wicked husband."

"Oh, don't!" said Elise, putting up her hand with a look of pain. "Don't talk about Alan! But I will advertise, if you think I had better, though I scarcely know what to say. Perhaps you will help me."

"Willingly, my child."

Elise continued her preparations for leaving the quiet city which had been for a brief season her home, and, in the meantime, several of the Philadelphia papers, dailies and weeklies, contained a "personal," asking that the clergyman who, on a certain date, at some country place, a few miles from Philadelphia, had performed the marriage ceremony for a Mr. Alan Torrence—using the gentleman's seal-ring, instead of a wedding-ring, which had been forgotten—would call upon, or send his address, to Rebecca Smith, — street.

All along, Elise had thought the venture hopeless. Alan had said that she was not his wife, that she could substantiate no claims against him, and she believed that it must be so. Still, the two Quaker ladies had coaxed her to stay on with them, several days beyond the time that she had fixed for her departure to New York.

At last, however, Elise would wait no longer. She had secured a good woman for nurse and companion, and the day of her journey had come. But that very morning, while she stood at Miss Smith's parlor window, she saw a man come slowly along the pavement, and up the three little white steps, upon the little white stoop of Mrs. Smith's house—an elderly man, dressed in plain but neat clerical black, with a face that she had seen before; it was the face of the clergyman who had married her!

CHAPTER XVIII.

MEADOW GRANGE.

Two ladies walked in the sunny porch that stretched along the front of a fine old Jersey homestead.

It was a low, rambling, picturesque house, that had been in the possession of a family of Gardiners, descending from father to eldest son for over a century. The first Gardiner, an Englishman of noble birth, had built the house after a good old English style; but, until late years, it had so often been rebuilt in this place, torn down in that, and added to in another, that now it was a fantastic mixture of queer little gables, dormer windows, square, old-fashioned windows with tiny diamond-shaped panes, long French windows of plate-glass, balconies and wings, the whole softened to mellow mossy tints by generations of sun and rain, and overrun with great vines of that "rare old plant—the ivy green."

The broad porch, almost level with the ground, over which many childish feet had scampered, and in which many a maiden had listened to words of love, was the one place that, for a half-century, had not been molested by the innovating finger of progress. And here, in the yellow October sunshine, walked Agnes Gardiner and her mother.

Mrs. Gardiner was a tall, fine-looking, elderly woman, with Agnes's clear, pallid complexion and reddish brown hair; indeed, there was a striking resemblance between the two ladies, and they might almost be taken for sisters, rather than mother and daughter, for Mrs. Gardiner still retained her youthful looks to a wonderful degree.

"Dearest mamma," Agnes was saying, "you are not more glad to have me home again than I am to be here. I wonder," she added, suddenly, with a charming touch of emotion, such as she never betrayed before others than her mother, "how I ever came to promise to go away from Meadow Grange, forever!" and her eyes wandered down the grand old-fashioned avenue, with the mossy turf sloping away from it on either side, in one expanse of unbroken green, and rows of trees interlacing their leafy boughs, above it, and on, to where the highway was shut out by splendid hedges, and the highlands uprose in the hazy, golden distance.

"Agnes, darling?" Mrs. Gardiner said, in her low, musical, tender way, and there was an intonation of surprise and inquiry that made the words a question.

"Oh, no, mamma! Don't be thinking that!" Agnes answered, swiftly. "I am not regretting my engagement—not in the least. I am sure that when you know Mr. Van Alst you will think with me that it is in every way a desirable one."

"I hope so, Agnes, for much as I have desired that you, almost the last of an old and noble family, should marry well, I have never desired you to marry for wealth alone."

"Well, mamma, Mr. Van Alst belongs to a good old German family. His parents died when he was quite a child, and he received a superior education under the supervision of his grandfather; or, rather, under his general supervision, for I believe he first attended Ameri-

can schools and then returned to Germany, and went through a university course."

"I supposed he was the child of Mr. Van Alst's eldest son," said Mrs. Gardiner.

"Yes," said Agnes; "I say yes, mamma, for I suppose he was, as his grandfather left him the greater part of his immense fortune."

"And the remainder to Carl's uncle?"

"No, it seems that some years ago the old gentleman settled a portion upon Mr. Frederick Van Alst, who was already rich; his will provided that the remainder of his property was to be divided, at his death, between his two grandchildren, each being an only child, upon the condition that they married each other, immediately upon learning of the proviso."

"And they did?"

"Yes; Gertrude Van Alst was an invalid, and in Germany for her health at the time; and I think that Carl believed that his cousin was fond of him, so he fulfilled the conditions of the will. But his wife lived a few months only, and was buried, with a long line of Van Alsts, in Germany; and two-thirds of her property reverted to her father."

"Still, Mr. Carl Van Alst is very wealthy?"

"Very, mamma, and handsome, decidedly handsome."

"And a noble man, an honorable man, Agnes?"

"Why, yes, mamma; as far as one can know anything about a man whom they meet in society, I take Mr. Van Alst to be a perfectly honorable man. I do not think him a religious man in the least; so much of his life has been spent in Germany that he has imbibed a great many German, infidel views; and, perhaps, he is inclined to be a little dictatorial, but possibly all lovers are that. Certainly, he is a most devoted and ardent lover, and I have met no other man whom I have thought so desirable for a husband."

The ladies walked silently for a time, and then Mrs. Gardiner said, gently:

"Agnes, you are not a woman whose heart it is easy to win; but when you do love, you will give a royal and passionate devotion, of which you, as yet, hardly know yourself capable. Are you sure that Carl Van Alst is the man to awaken and minister to the deepest and warmest capabilities of your nature?"

"I doubt," answered Agnes, with just the slightest shade of sadness and dissatisfaction in her voice, "if any woman thoroughly loves until she is married, and grows more and more to depend upon her husband for affection and confidence; but I am sure that I like Mr. Van Alst—better than any man I have ever met."

Agnes spoke these last words forcefully; but rather as if because they had been commenced they must be finished, and there came a sudden strange flush and light to her cheeks and eyes. A carriage was rolling rapidly along the avenue toward the house, and Mrs. Gardiner hastily kissed her daughter upon the cheek, and whispered:

"God grant that the liking may prove a most satisfying love, my dear;" then she turned to see who was their visitor.

"It is Mr. Chandor," said Agnes. "I am glad you are to have the pleasure of meeting him, mamma," and the light in her eyes had not died away when Guy Chandor came upon the porch with outstretched hand.

"You see I have accepted your invitation, and in a hasty and informal manner for which I must ask your pardon. But I shall trespass upon your hospitality for an hour only."

"Oh, do not say that," said Agnes, turning to introduce him to her mother; "we should be so pleased to have you remain and make us a real visit."

But Mr. Chandor soon proved that this was impossible; he was on his way to Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, intending to advertise and make search for Elise in all of those cities, since it was from one of those places, probably from Baltimore or Philadelphia, that the man had traveled who had given to Mrs. Stanford the torn envelope addressed to Mrs. Chandor.

"And now," said Guy, smiling, "I must tell you why I have stopped here, and prepare you for my request. I have been to see Mrs. Stanford; and have discovered that Mrs. Stanford is, really, Mrs. Chandor."

CHAPTER XIX.

A LOVER'S QUARREL.

MR. CHANDOR'S announcement surprised both Mrs. Gardiner and Agnes into momentary silence. Then Agnes cried:

"Mrs. Chandor! Surely not—" and then she

paused. Why should she speak to this man of his wife? Elise had been no wife to him.

Perhaps Mr. Chandor interpreted her silence and its reasons. He answered, quickly:

"No, not Elise; but Mrs. Clyde Chandor, the wife of a cousin of mine. Clyde was scarcely more than a boy when he married her, is scarcely more than a boy yet, and she was a little traveling ballad-singer. As his father had an agent here, who was a sort of guardian to Clyde, the boy dare not marry under his own name for fear of being disinherited. During his last trip to France, however, his father has died, and as Clyde cannot return for some weeks yet, he wrote to me, asking me to procure handsome apartments at a hotel for Paula, and have her known immediately as his wife. After Rachel's visit to her, Paula wrote to her husband that I—she having known at the time who I was, but not daring to betray her husband's secret—was coming East; and she spoke of Rachel's kindness and her relation to me. As she did not know, nor mention, that Rachel was then on her way to Europe, Clyde thought that I might induce Mr. and Mrs. Lysson to be his wife's chaperons, and introduce her to a few nice people. Of course she cannot go into much society until she is out of mourning for her father-in-law—but Clyde wishes her to make some acquaintances, as he intends making his home in New York."

"Since Rachel is not here, and it seems scarcely the thing to establish a young girl, like my cousin's wife, alone in a fashionable hotel, I thought perhaps you ladies would play the good Samaritan, by inviting her here, for a short time, until I can establish myself permanently in town and make other arrangements. But I beg that you will freely state your wishes, since you know the whole history and Paula's antecedents. I should not have taken the great liberty, but I have no friends in town to whom I can apply for assistance in this case, and I desire to do the best I can for my young cousin."

"I promised Rachel," said Agnes, "that when I went to town I would be a friend to the lonely little lady; and I do not see why I should not commence now, do you, mamma?"

"No," assented Mrs. Gardiner, kindly; "and probably Mrs. Chandor will find it much more agreeable to make a few friends first, than to be thrown immediately upon society, and become its topic before the return of her husband."

Without any word of explanation between them, both ladies understood and admired the tender chivalry of Mr. Chandor's feelings toward this girl, who, in a manner, reminded him of his lost young wife. So it was agreed that Mrs. Gardiner, or Agnes, should write immediately to Mrs. Stanford, inclosing a note from Guy, and invite her to spend the remainder of October at Meadow Grange.

Thus the future of this girl-wife's life, this poor, unknown actress, seemed opening full of most pleasant promises; while another girl, by marriage her cousin—a girl better born, who had had education, and wealthy parents, and influential friends—was wandering none knew whither, and suffering few could guess what.

A few hours after Guy Chandor's departure, there came another guest to Meadow Grange. He had notified Agnes by telegram of his coming, and she was out upon the porch to meet him in the sunset—her splendid reddish hair, which artists loved to paint, burnished by the golden cloud-light, and the trailing black grenadine, which she had donned because the evening was so warm, clinging about her in graceful folds, revealing the perfect symmetry of her form, heightening the calm beauty of her aristocratic face, and betraying through its silky meshes the pearly fairness and voluptuous outlines of her fine shoulders and arms.

Certainly, she made a very fair picture; and Carl Van Alst was glad that he had chosen this girl, so perfect of health and form and manner, to share his immense wealth, his proud old name, and to be the mistress of his life.

"You are glad that I am come, Agnes? It seems an eternity since we parted."

"I am very pleased to see you," said Agnes, with frank welcome; "and so will mamma be. I hope you will like being at Meadow Grange—that you will even like Meadow Grange itself, for my sake."

"Are you so fond of this picturesque old house?" asked Carl, tenderly.

"Yes, very fond of it. I think I never knew how fond, until now that the time approaches for me to leave it."

"Do you regret that you are to leave it, darling? Do you not remember for whose sake you relinquish this home?" he asked, gazing passionately into her serious violet eyes.

"No, not more I think than any girl regrets to leave a home that has been hers all her life, for generations and generations; but then Meadow Grange is mamma's until she dies, so that as long as she lives and comes here, I shall never have really said good-by to it."

"But you will never think of it regretfully, Agnes, when you have seen the splendid home across the water, that will be yours, or live in the splendid home that I will make for you—in any land you choose."

"Let us hope not," replied Agnes, lightly.

"Let us hope not," repeated Carl, with a sudden fierceness that was startling. "Do you not expect to be contented as my wife, and happy—supremely happy? Do you know of any reasons why you should not be?"

"If I did, I should never have given my promise to marry you," said Agnes, calmly. "But the power to be contented and happy lies greatly within ourselves; and we never know how we make or mar our futures. But I must not detain you out here longer. It is nearly the dinner hour, and mamma is probably wondering why we do not come in."

Mr. Van Alst admired Agnes's stately but gracious lady-mother, and his first evening with his betrothed in her own home passed enjoyably away; enjoyably, at least, until a casual mention was made of Guy Chandor's call that day. From that moment, a host of evil passions rioted in Carl's heart. Had he taken time to deliberate over the matter, probably he would not have mentioned it to Agnes, but when, a few minutes later, they strolled upon the porch, and he found himself alone with his affiancée, his jealousy betrayed itself.

"So Mr. Chandor visits you at Meadow Grange, does he, Agnes? Is he given to feel that it is quite allowable for married gentlemen to visit single ladies here?"

"Mr. Van Alst!" exclaimed Agnes, withdrawing her hand from his arm and confronting him, a world of scorn and command in her voice, and her violet eyes darkening to black, in swift anger. "May I ask you to explain yourself?"

"I have nothing to explain," retorted Carl, "except that I do not care to have a lady who is to be Mrs. Van Alst receiving visits from a married man who is almost a stranger to her, and is separated in some mysterious way from his wife."

"How do you know that he is separated in a mysterious way from his wife?" demanded Agnes.

"Because, as I understand it, he is married but has no wife traveling about with him; and the reason that she is not with him is so much of a secret that you would not discuss it even with your betrothed. And I must request you, in future, to have no acquaintance with gentlemen who are permitted to have secrets with you, which you are not permitted to share with your husband."

"You forget," said Agnes, coolly, "that I have no husband!" Then she went on, very calmly: "Over a year ago Mr. Chandor married the only sister of an old friend and schoolmate of mine. The day after their marriage, Mrs. Chandor disappeared, and nothing was ever learned concerning her, until I went to New York in August, and discovered a clew which Mr. and Mrs. Lysson followed for a little, and then, upon their departure for Europe, left in my hands, to deliver to Mr. Chandor. This has led to an acquaintance, which I know of no reason for terminating. I have always selected my acquaintances, according to my own judgment, and I beg to have it thoroughly understood that I shall continue to do so!"

They stood silently, for a moment, looking into each other's eyes, then Carl broke it in a low, intense way.

"Agnes, if you knew how I hated this man, you would be careful how you defied my wishes in regard to him!"

"Hate a perfect stranger?" cried Agnes, with stinging scorn.

"Why not?" asked Carl, abruptly. "I hate any man to whom you show favors; and I insist upon knowing whether you intend to comply with my wishes?"

"That is easily answered," said Agnes, with a gesture of supreme indifference, "by my assuring you that your personal independence, to do and act as you please, I shall never infringe upon; and my personal independence, to do and act as I please, I will never allow you to infringe upon. If we cannot understand, and accept, these conditions, absolutely, now, it is useless for us to expect to be anything to each other in the future."

She waited a moment for him to speak, and in that moment Carl recognized that he must relinquish any attempts to rule this woman yet.

for he could not lose her—this one love of his—and so, as she turned her fair, proud face from him, he flung his arms about her, and held her close to his breast, and assured her, again and again, that it was his love for her—his mad, unreasoning, passionate love—that had awakened this demon of jealousy within him. That he had not half known what he had said, but that he regretted it all, and would not again offend. And then he pictured his love so vividly, and called her such endearing names, and wooed her with such charming grace, that Agnes could but forgive his jealous outbreak, and seal her forgiveness with a few of the kisses for which Carl so thirsted, and she so seldom voluntarily bestowed.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SHADOWS OF COMING EVENTS.

BLANCHE LORRIMER came from the street into the warm, luxurious parlor where Issalene sat reading, bringing a breath of the November sunshine and crispness with her, as well as brilliantly blue eyes full of happy lights, and cheeks rivaling the fairest peach that had ever bloomed to ripeness under summer suns.

"Issalene, I've quite a budget of news for you," she announced, gayly, as she tossed her pretty silken muff upon a chair, and commenced drawing off her daintily-fitting gloves.

"Well?" said Issalene, lazily.

"The Wildes and the Gardiners are in town."

"Oh, that is no news at all. Their cards came this morning. Mrs. Gardiner receives tomorrow, and Mrs. Wilde Thursdays. I suppose we must call. What a bore it is—this calling and receiving calls from people you hate."

"How absurd you are, Issa. You ought never to be a society woman, if you are going to hate more than half the people you meet, and not want to fulfill any social duties."

"I have no desire to be a society woman!" said Issalene, contemptuously. "I only go in society, this year, because papa and mamma desire it. But, to have the greater part of my life filled by the demands of other people upon my time, is not my ideal of happiness."

"Oh! you have an ideal!" laughed Blanche.

"Do tell me what it is!"

"To marry a man I love, and devote my life utterly to him!" announced Issalene, decidedly.

"Of course, every girl, when she marries, ought to make her husband the chief consideration in her life, but that need not prevent her from maintaining her position as well. Your ideas are ridiculously romantic. Would you be so devoted if you married Mr. De Lancy?"

"Mr. De Lancy!" exclaimed Miss Sanfrey, angrily. "I think it is positively rude of you, Blanche, to mention his name so often, when you know how I despise him, and even to hear of him!"

"But you see I cannot very well help mentioning him, when he comes here nearly every week."

"But you know that I take excellent care not to see him!"

"Yes, I know," said Blanche, dryly, "that you take excellent care to let mamma and I entertain visitors of whom you are not over fond; but I think that it would be evidence of improving good manners in you, if you would assume a little of your own responsibility in regard to visitors who come pre-eminently to see you."

"But I sha'n't see him!" said Issalene, defiantly. "So you can spare yourself any more talk about it; and aunt Lorrimer may tell him so, and advise him to quit visiting here, as quickly as she likes."

"Oh, you may change your mind in regard to him, by and by; and it would be a shame to have sent him beyond recall," said Blanche, with provoking coolness. "But you have not asked me concerning the rest of my news."

"I supposed that you had told it all," replied Issalene, sulkily.

"Oh, no! I have two engagements to announce."

What young lady is not interested at the mention of an engagement? Issalene forgot her pique and glanced up with quick inquiry.

"Whose, pray?"

"Well, Flossy Rodwell is engaged, for one."

"Oh, really! Then Mr. Wilde has succumbed, at last, to the charms of her floating hair and all her affected airs and graces."

"No!" retorted Blanche, with a slight ring of triumph in her clear voice, "it is not Mr. Wilde who has succumbed, but our dapper little Englishman, Willis Leonard."

"Oh! Well, I would rather he should have fallen into her hands than any of the other men she tried to attract. How she did set her cap at

Mr. Richmond, and Henrion Wilde, and even uncle Frederick."

"It is a wonder that Carl escaped scot-free."

"He did not. She laid siege to him in the beginning, and gave him up in despair."

"Well, I suppose some one else was more successful in laying siege to Carl's heart. Agnes Gardiner is engaged."

"Agnes Gardiner! Engaged! To whom?"

"Why, to Carl, probably!"

"And I think probably not!" retorted Issalene, decidedly. "I have excellent reasons for believing that Carl Van Alst has not the slightest intentions of marrying Agnes Gardiner. Why, don't you know that the Gardiners are really poor? They just manage to keep in society, and when Mrs. Gardiner dies Agnes will not have a cent in the world, as the property upon which they live will go to an old uncle, the last male Gardiner. Carl told me this himself; and do you think he is likely to marry such a girl?"

"I do not know why he should not. Miss Gardiner is of a good family, and a perfect lady, and Carl has money enough to marry whom he pleases. It was Marion Dare who told me. I met her upon the avenue—she has come to spend the winter with the Wildes—and when she said Miss Gardiner was engaged I never thought to ask her to whom, for I supposed of course it was to Carl. Still, as you say, he may not be the favored one. Miss Gardiner is fascinating and greatly admired; and I have heard that she has a great many offers."

"She isn't my style!" said Issalene, with a little sneer.

"Of course not!" laughed Blanche. "Who is, I wonder? By the way, Mrs. Wilde gives a dinner next week, a very private little affair, to introduce to a few friends a new candidate for social favor—a Mrs. Chandor, who has quite a romantic history."

"Mrs. Chandor!" cried Issalene, with a little start.

"Yes; her husband is a wealthy young Frenchman, and she, Marion says, is a perfect little fairy. He met and married her South, somewhere, and they have lived under an assumed name, for fear his father would disinherit them. But now the father is dead, and they are very wealthy, and will settle in New York. Mr. Chandor is in Europe and will not return until next month; but she has been visiting the Gardiners, and has rooms with them at the Everett House; and now Mrs. Wilde has taken her up."

"Mrs. Wilde must always have some one to pet," said Issalene. "When is she going to give the dinner?"

"Next Tuesday; and we are to be included among the favored few."

"I doubt if I shall go," remarked Issalene. "I do not care for such little dinner-parties; besides, it is the very night before our 'coming-out' ball. I suppose you and aunt Lorrimer will go, so I can easily excuse myself. By the way, Blanche, can we not go to Madame Lemmouroy's to-day to see about our dresses?"

"I have been there, this morning, and given all the orders for mine. I grew tired of waiting for you to decide what you would have."

"I have decided now; but since you have been, I will not trouble you to go again."

"What have you chosen?" asked Blanche.

"A heavy silk of pale lemon color, trimmed with the laces mamma sent me. And papa has commissioned uncle Frederick to buy me diamonds—ear-rings, necklace and bracelets, and he is to go with me to-morrow to purchase them."

"You will be sure to look handsome," admitted Blanche, "and to quite outshine me; for I shall have to waive diamonds, and be contented with the opals mamma is having reset for me."

Just as Blanche made this honest confession a servant announced:

"Mr. Henrion Wilde."

"Good-morning, Miss Lorrimer. Good-morning, Miss Sanfrey. I must beg your pardon for the informality of this my first visit, but I did not reach town until late last night, too late to avail myself of the privilege of calling upon you—though I knew that it was your reception evening."

"I am sure we have only to thank you for remembering us so soon," Blanche said, with a cordiality that was so charming after her *hauter* of the last few days they had spent together, that Henrion was at his ease at once.

"Oh, I was sure to do that; all through October, while I was up in Maine, I looked forward to renewing our companionship of the past summer."

"Then you have been away?" said Issalene.

"Yes; John Richmond, and quite a party of us gentlemen, thought we would try our hand at a hunting expedition up in the backwoods; and we have been roughing it finely."

"But you enjoyed yourselves, I suppose," said Blanche, with a shade less of warmth in her manner this time.

"Oh, immensely! Still I must say I was glad to get home. A little of that sort of life goes a great way, and I am rather partial to civilization myself."

"And the delights of feminine companionship?" suggested Issalene, lightly.

"Certainly; what would civilization be without that?" laughed Henrion. "And that suggests that I accept verbally the invitation for Mrs. Lorrimer's ball I found awaiting me at home. Please present to her my compliments, and say that nothing would induce me to forego the pleasure of paying her my respects upon that occasion. And though I understand that that is to be a formal introduction of you young ladies to society, I hope you do not keep yourselves in such strict seclusion at present as to make a plan I have for to-morrow night a failure. I met your guardian, Mr. Van Alst, and Carl Van Alst, at the club-room this morning, and we agreed to make up an opera-party for to-morrow night, to hear Lucca. Mrs. and Miss Gardiner, and my cousin Marion are going, and I hope that Mrs. Lorrimer and yourself will consent to join us."

"I cannot answer for mamma, but I shall be happy to accept the invitation, and so, I presume, will Issalene."

"Certainly," said Sanfrey.

"By the way," said Henrion, when, a few minutes later, he arose to leave, "I suppose you have heard of Miss Gardiner's engagement to Carl Van Alst?"

"Yes, I met Marion this morning, and she told me," responded Blanche, as she walked slowly with him toward the hall.

When she turned again Issalene had left the parlor, and Miss Lorrimer exclaimed, bitterly:

"He tells of Agnes's engagement; but he never mentions Miss Rodwell's. I wonder if he could have been in love with that girl? At least I will never let him make me forget that scene."

And by constantly recalling the picture of those two figures she had seen in the moonlight at Wilde Manor, Blanche endeavored to steel her heart against the man who was so near to winning her love.

CHAPTER XXI.

CHECKMATED.

ISSALEDNE was not well the evening of the opera-party; she complained of a severe headache after going early with her uncle Frederick to select her diamonds, and declined to accompany her aunt and cousin upon a round of calls. So Mrs. Lorrimer and Blanche went together, and paid a visit of congratulation to Mrs. and Miss Gardiner, and consulted Madame Lemmouroy again concerning the dresses for the party, and completed some other arrangements tending to the success of that coming social event.

As soon as Blanche Reached home, she ran up to her cousin's room. The apartment was darkened, and Issalene was tossing restlessly upon the bed.

"Issalene, are you no better? Shall you not be able to go to the opera to-night?"

"I have no desire to go," said Issalene, peevishly.

"Why, what is the matter?" asked Blanche, anxiously, as she caught a glimpse of Issalene's frightfully pale face, from which her dark eyes gleamed feverishly. "Is it only your head?"

"Of course it is only my head," returned the Cuban girl, again petulantly. "You don't think that I'm sick, do you? People don't get sick so easily, and just when they want to."

Miss Lorrimer could not but believe that something more than a mere headache ailed Issalene, to make her look so wretchedly and talk so strangely. Still she knew that her cousin was possessed of anything but an amiable disposition when any ill troubled her, so she thought best not to question her further, but commenced to tell her, in a lively way, where she had called, the society gossip she had heard, and the further arrangements that had been made for the ball; to all of which Miss Sanfrey listened with few comments; and, finally, after asking what she should send up for dinner, Miss Lorrimer arose to go. As she reached the door she stopped suddenly.

"Issalene, who do you suppose is to be one of our party to-night?"

"Who?" asked Issalene, indifferently.

"Jack Jaffrey! I have not seen him, until today, in an age; and he used to come here so much when we were school-girls."

Miss Sanfrey made no answer to the announcement, so Blanche closed the door softly, and left her to herself. But the moment that her cousin was out of her room, Issalene sprang from the bed, and commenced pacing the floor, muttering, fiercely:

"What does she want to come here for, and talk to me about Jack Jaffrey, or any one who was connected with Alan, and those dear old days? For they were dear days!" she said, stopping before her long mirror to regard her white face and glittering eyes. "Yes, dear days! though he was making love to that Wallbridge girl. But he tired of her—she was just the girl for a man like Alan to tire of—and there was hope for me until this new fancy of his! But now he will never love me! Never love me? And yet has he not just lately told me, in a thousand ways, that he loved me? But men like Alan Torrence are never true! I ought to have known it! What a fool I have been to believe him at all—to be for one hour his dupe! But he shall find that I am not to be trifled with; that because he has not written to my father, nor spoken to uncle Frederick, and openly asked my hand, he cannot fool me at his will!" and she clenched her little hands, and resumed her rapid walk, her face fairly livid and her eyes blazing with passion.

And all through that evening she nourished her fierce resentment, even as she had for years nourished her fierce love for Alan Torrence.

Through this last year of her life Issalene's long-cherished hopes of one day winning Alan's love had seemed well-nigh fulfilled. Indeed, although she saw much less of him than in her early school-girl days, she had believed that her hopes were already a surety, when, suddenly, had come to her a rumor that Alan's affections were engaged and promised elsewhere; still she would not admit to her own heart that Alan could deceive her, until she had been suddenly assured that this contemplated marriage was in society an accepted fact! And now what were the loves and hates of others, what were society fetes and triumphs, compared to the desolation and the fierce desire for revenge that seared the ungovernable nature of this girl?

When Alan Torrence received, one morning, at his club-room, a delicate envelope bearing Issalene's superscription and crest, and containing a note requesting that he would spend the evening alone with her, the night preceding Mrs. Lorrimer's ball, he understood, perfectly, that the Cuban girl was summoning him to a wrathful interview. He knew that Issalene could not fail to have heard of his intended marriage, and that she would not easily relinquish the claims she believed she had on him by right of the tender flirtation of which he had for a diplomatic reason of his own, made her the victim. He thought, too, that he understood her stormy Cuban nature, and her utter implacableness, if he failed to be true to the expectations he had purposely allowed her to cherish; still he knew that he must break his lance with her, and did not fear but that in the bitter warfare he should conquer. So he wrote her a note, saying that he should not fail to keep the appointment.

The Tuesday of Mrs. Wilde's little dinner-party came, and Issalene declared her intention of remaining at home. When her aunt and cousin were gone, and she had given orders to the servant that one only visitor was to be admitted, she went into the parlor, and pacing ceaselessly up and down, waited excitedly for Alan's coming.

She knew his ringing footstep upon the pavement, and the touch of his hand upon the door-bell, and suddenly stood still—a proud, rigid figure, with gleaming eyes and carnation-deep cheeks, while he came smiling and *debonnair* into her presence.

"How kind of you, Issalene, to deprive yourself of a party, just to stay at home and see me."

"Do you think so?" said Issalene, fierily; and then her eyelids drooped, and the flame of her passion flickered low for the moment. In his presence, the consciousness of her love overcame for a time her furious anger. "Do you think," she asked, changing her tone, "there is anything in the wide world I would not deny myself for your sake?"

"I don't know," he laughed, throwing himself into an easy-chair, despite the fact that Issalene still stood; "women are so given to making rash promises only to break them."

"Alan!" cried the Cuban girl, suddenly flinging herself at his feet, and wreathing her arms

about him, and lifting her glowing face to his, "do you not know that I would do anything for your sake?"

"And what if you would?" he asked, forcing himself to regard calmly the glowing, trembling, passionate girl.

"Why, is such love a small matter? Think you any woman will ever give you such mad, fervent passion, as I can bestow?"

"But suppose I do not care for such love—suppose I am weary of it?"

"Weary of it?" exclaimed Issalene, scornfully. "How could you be weary of it? Do these icy Northern women understand in the least what love is? Elise may have wearied you with her babyish fondness, but what did she, a little Puritan, with milk and water flowing in her veins, know of love like mine?"

"Hush!" he commanded, impatiently, flinging aside the tiny hands that were clasped upon his breast, and pushing from him the beautiful, quivering form. "You have no reason for coupling my name with that of Elise Wallbridge, and no authority for doing so! And I would advise you to get up, as my fair *affiancee* might not care to know of a young lady kneeling to me in this absurd fashion!"

"Your *affiancee*!" cried Issalene, springing to her feet, her face grown pale with rage. "What right have you to talk of any one as your *affiancee*, after all you have said to me?"

"After all that I have said to you? I believe I never said anything about marrying you, and you were as well posted in flirtations as myself, Issalene!"

"But, there was no flirtation between us! You did not intend me to understand it was such! You knew, to commence with, that I had loved you for years, and you made me believe that you reciprocated that love!"

"No, matter what you think I intended you to believe, I know that I said nothing that a man might not say, to a girl whom he had known intimately from her childhood. Certainly, I have never had the slightest intention of asking you to be my wife, so, unless you have something of more importance to say, we had better terminate this interview."

"But I have something of importance to say!" regarding him with stony calm. "Since you have seen fit to trifle with my love, you shall find out how you like my hate!"

"Ma chere Issalene," he said, tauntingly, "hate is not a pleasant passion for a lady to indulge; but I assure you that I do not mind it as much as you may suppose."

"We will see! You said, a minute ago, that I had no authority for coupling your name with Elise Wallbridge's. Suppose I tell you that I have a positive proof that you were the man who induced Mrs. Chandor to desert her husband! And I tell Elise's story, and your story, to the woman you propose to make your wife, and show her these proofs?"

"You have no such proofs," said Alan, coolly.

"I have!" cried Issalene, triumphantly. "I have the envelope in which a letter was sent to Mrs. Chandor, the day that she left her husband. I know that last summer you gave that envelope to a lady upon a train coming from Washington. And I have another proof against you, in the cover of a book upon which you wrote for this lady; and she can identify you at any time. Do you think these are light proofs to take to the woman you expect to marry? And will she be very likely to marry you then?"

"Listen!" said Alan, contemptuously. "You think you have a strong case against me, Issalene; but in reality you have a miserably weak one. I will not even ask you how you became possessed of these papers; nor what credit you think your statements will receive, if I announce that before mention of them you knelt at my feet and sued for my love. But, suppose I was the man, who, as you say, gave away this envelope—which I do not believe you nor any one else can prove? That fact, alone, can never be any evidence that I was the person who sent it to Mrs. Chandor, nor that I have ever had anything to do with Mrs. Chandor. You tell this fact to my betrothed; it is the only one you know against me; and even that you cannot substantiate. Is she likely, whether she is marrying me for love, or for position, to let it stand in the way of that marriage, when the engagement has been made public and the wedding-day set?"

"There is not one woman in a hundred who would, at such a time, be influenced by such a trifling matter. And my betrothed is not that one woman. So I tell you, plainly, that you had better submit to the inevitable, with lady-

like grace, and not make a laughing-stock of yourself!"

And with that very unpalatable advice, Mr. Alan Torrence left Issalene to the stinging consciousness that she was checkmated.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE NIGHT OF THE BALL.

WHEN Alan Torrence was gone, Issalene rushed to her own room, and fought the fierce battle with wounded love, and passionate desire for revenge, and stinging self-contempt, until the gray cold light of the dawning day stole dimly through the laces at her windows and struggled for dominion with the slender flame of gas. Then, desiring, with defiant pride, to look her loveliest the evening of the ball, she threw herself upon her bed to get a little rest; and, exhausted by a week of conflicting passions, and the excitement of the night, soon sunk into a heavy sleep that lasted until noon and restored her to her wonted blooming beauty.

She had thought deeply of what Alan had assured her—the weakness of her proofs against him as the person who had eloped with Mrs. Chandor. In her own mind she was convinced that he was responsible for Elise's sin; but would she be able to force upon others the same conviction? Suppose she were to tell Blanche this story, or her uncle Frederick, would they be likely to believe anything upon slight proof against Alan, which he chose to deny? She was conscious that they would not. How much less, then, would a woman believe it who was about to marry him; or even if she believed it, as Alan had said, would one woman in a hundred let that stand between them and their love or advantage, especially at a moment when to do so would be a matter for a nine days' scandal?

True, Issalene might find out Mr. Chandor, and deliver him the papers, and put him upon Alan's track; but in doing so she must reveal that she had become dishonorably possessed of these papers; besides, Mr. Chandor might not succeed in proving anything against Alan, or in proving anything in time to interfere with the marriage. The chirography upon the cover of the book was like Alan's, but that upon the envelope differed somewhat from his, and how could she know that a hundred other men did not write a hand identical with his just as a general description of Alan might answer to a general description of many other?

From the time she had overheard Miss Gardiner's conversation with Blanche, concerning Elise, Issalene felt positive that Alan was the man in the case. And when, accidentally, she learned of the existence of proofs against him, she had possessed herself of these proofs, in order to protect him from exposure, or to use them as a power over him, as his conduct toward her should warrant. And she had firmly and triumphantly believed in their power, until she analyzed the whole matter, in the light thrown upon it by Alan. Now, she saw the weakness of her plot. But revenge she was determined to have! There was time enough yet, before Alan would marry, in which to perfect her plans. She had said once, that if Alan should not love her she would kill herself—but that she would kill him first; and so she would!

But, in the meantime, she could not banish from her mind the horrible thought that she had declared her love for Alan, and had sued for his as he had tauntingly told her, kneeling at his feet. Her haughty nature, passionately as it could love, rebelled against the thought that its love had been wasted and repulsed. And she swore to herself that she would show Alan that at least she could rise superior to her affection for him. That she would not for a day wear the willow for his sake! And it was with this resolve, and the desire to accomplish it, that Issalene at last sought the slumber that she knew she needed to restore the bloom to her cheeks and the sparkle to her eyes for the coming ball.

It was a charming trio of ladies who waited in Mrs. Lorrimer's parlors that night to receive their guests; the fair, faded, but elegant and gentle matron, in her faultless robe of velvet, with rich old laces and a few choice diamonds completing her costume, and the two fair girls, upon her either side, each so beautiful, and yet so unlike the other in her style of loveliness. Blanche wore a dress of delicate blue satin, frosted over with fine lace, and trimmed from her bare white shoulders and her slender waist, to the flounce that bordered her overskirt and revealed below her satin train, with clusters and garlands of blush roses set in masses of dark leaves. Milky opals clasped the throat and arms that almost rivaled them in whiteness, and revealed their fiery hearts with every glancing of the light, and an aigrette of the ex-

quisite stones flashed and shimmered in the marvelous yellow hair that made Blanche Lorrimer everywhere an object of admiration.

Issalene's petite, rounded figure was draped in lemon-colored silk, from which her dusky, satiny skin shone wonderfully lovely and enticing. Handsome laces, wreathed with maroon-deep velvet, completed the elaborate dress; delicate diamond circlets glittered upon her throat and arms, a diamond drop quivered at each tiny ear; and just where a touch of exquisite lace was fixed,

"To fall and rise
Upon her balm bosom,
With her laughter and her sighs,"

she had fastened a spray of blood-red roses, from out a basket of flowers sent by Mr. De Lancy. Certainly, it was hard to decide whether the tall, blue-eyed, golden-haired Northern girl or the glowing little maiden of a luxurious sun-land made the most bewildering picture, as they stood by Mrs. Lorrimer's side receiving the congratulations of their "dear five hundred friends." And so the guests thought, as they thronged into the brilliant, flower-sweet rooms and greeted their hostess, and her daughter and niece, in whose honor the *fete* was given.

Two men were there at least, who would have cast their vote for Issalene; and one was Alan Torrence. He had never seen Miss Sanfrey look so entrancingly handsome, and he wondered how he could have so rudely repulsed this little beauty the night before. It seemed to him now, as she gave him the tips of her gloved fingers with smiling indifference, and then turned to welcome Mr. De Lancy, with heightened color and her bosom pulsing under her elderly admirer's rapturous glance, that he should find it impossible to have the chance again, and not take this exquisite piece of flesh and blood into his arms, and waste upon the full ripe lips a few warm kisses. And Hugh De Lancy was the other man whose admiration for the little Cuban was boundless. He longed to conquer the girl's aversion for him; to capture this tropic bird for his gilded cage: and he was nearer success than he dreamed.

"Dance with you? I think not," said Issalene, in answer to Alan's request for one of the first three dances. "I find the first two quadrilles are reserved for Mr. De Lancy, and I shall not waltz: at least, not so early in the evening."

Alan bowed coolly, and walked away, while Mr. De Lancy, who heard this pointed remark, and who had not even dreamed of asking for the dances in question, asked, eagerly:

"Is this true, Miss Sanfrey? Have you so honored me as to save me these quadrilles?"

"If you care for them," said Issalene coquettishly.

"You cannot doubt that," he answered, with an ardent glance.

So Issalene placed her hand within his arm, and, slowly and stately, they walked through the first quadrille; and then—Miss Sanfrey had said she would not waltz; would she not promenade with him?

"Yes, but it is already getting warm here," said Issalene. "Do you mind going to the conservatory, for a breath of fresher air?"

Her escort led her away from the glare and the crowd, and the moment they were alone Issalene turned to him with gracious warmth, saying:

"I so thank you for your lovely flowers, Mr. De Lancy. As a proof that I valued them beyond any that were sent me, I selected a few to wear. I hope you do not mind my presumption."

"Mind it! Miss Sanfrey, you do not know how it pleases me, and how happy I should be if I thought—"

"If you thought what?" questioned Issalene, smilingly, as he hesitated.

"If I dared to believe that you wore them as a slight proof of regard for the giver. You must know, Miss Sanfrey," he went on, fairly trembling with eagerness, "that I have adored you from the moment we first met; and if I could win your promise to become my wife, I should consider myself the most blest of men! Am I too daring in my dreams, Miss Sanfrey? Have I ruined my cause by thus hastily declaring it, or is there some hope for me?"

"Am I to understand this as a proposal?" asked Issalene, raising her dark velvety eyes to his face, and then shyly drooping them.

"If you will, and let me know my fate, sweet one!" he cried, gathering hope from her glance, and seizing her pretty hands.

"Then—I have not the slightest objection to becoming your wife," said Issalene, demurely.

But as the ugly, elderly man encircled her forcefully in his arms, and kissed her red lips, again and again, and even left a caress upon her bared shoulder, the girl felt cold shivers of

repugnance and disgust creeping over her frame, and freed herself as quickly as possible from her betrothed's clasp.

"I suppose we may as well tell auntie of this upon the first convenient opportunity," said Issalene.

"Oh, certainly; and perhaps until to-morrow you would not mind wearing this;" and he drew off his glove, and from his little finger a blazing diamond, which he slipped upon Issalene's engagement finger.

They had scarcely re-entered the ball-room when they met Mrs. Lorrimer, and Issalene stopped by her long enough to say:

"Auntie, I am sure you will congratulate me—I have promised to marry Mr. De Lancy."

Mrs. Lorrimer could scarcely conceal her surprise, sufficiently to extend the desired congratulations; but she knew by the ring upon Issalene's finger, and the look upon her niece's face, that the girl had determinedly made her choice. And before the evening was half over nearly every guest had heard of the little brunette's betrothal to the ugly old millionaire.

"What a strange match! And she seemed so to detest Mr. De Lancy," said Agnes Gardiner, as she waltzed with her lover.

"I know that she hated him, and hates him even now," answered Carl; "but, I imagine her affections were engaged elsewhere, and not reciprocated, and she has done this out of pique."

"And do you think she will marry that old man?"

"Oh, I suppose so; it would be just like her to make herself miserable for life for the sake of a fancied retaliation."

"I am sorry for her!" said Agnes, gently.

But the girl that was the object of so much comment, no more meant to live to marry Hugh De Lancy, than she meant to let Alan Torrence live to marry the wife of his choice.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MAN EXERCISES A WOMAN'S PRIVILEGE.

AFTER their one difference the course of true love had seemed to run smoothly enough with Carl and Agnes; and never was there a more devoted lover than Mr. Van Alst during the weeks that intervened between Miss Gardiner's establishment in town and the day appointed for their wedding. That day was appointed for the eighteenth of December; and the reception, a grand affair, was to take place at the hotel where the Gardiners had spent their winters for many years.

At first Mrs. Gardiner had thought of taking a house in town, but as Carl proposed to spend two or three months in California and the South, which would leave her alone during the greater part of the winter and early spring, it was finally decided that Agnes should receive her friends at the hotel—the most elegant rooms in the house being secured for the bridal entertainment.

With all the social demands made upon her, and the demands of dressmakers and her lover, Miss Gardiner still spared, from her limited time, an occasional hour to spend with Mrs. Clyde Chandor, in whom she was greatly interested. Mrs. Chandor had only availed herself of Mrs. Gardiner's invitation to visit Meadow Grange for an exceedingly brief period; and, since her establishment in town, had refused to make many acquaintances, or to frequent any entertainments, until the return of her husband. Agnes and her mother had thought this determination quite for the best, and had made no attempt to urge her to go out, and with the exception of the little dinner-party given her by kind Mrs. Wilde, and the calls she had received from the ladies she met there, Paula had quite withheld herself from any companionship but that of the Gardiners. But then, she was so used to being much alone since her marriage, and she found such delight in caring for and fondling her baby, that she did not think she was missing much in foregoing the opportunities opened to her for seeing something of the society in which Clyde so desired she should be known and received.

Toward the last of November, Guy Chandor had returned from his quest for Elise in Washington, Baltimore, and Philadelphia—returned unsuccessful, as he had feared that he would, though he had made every endeavor through advertisement, detective agency, and private search, to discover some trace of her; and he was very kind to his young cousin, and gave her many useful suggestions concerning her real *entree* into society; he had discovered that she was entirely free from *mauvaise grace*, intuitively a little lady, and quick to profit by what she saw and heard. And a well-bred, winning gentleman may, if he will, be as much

of a help to a [girl, as regards the rules that should govern a refined society lady, as a friend of her own sex.

"I suppose you know, cousin Guy," Paula had said to him, during their first conversation after his return to New York, "that Miss Gardiner is to be married next month?"

"Married next month! Impossible!" and Guy suddenly arose and walked to the window. Then, biting his lips under his fair mustache, he said to himself, angrily:

"Guy Chandor, are you a fool? It is not impossible! Why should it be?" and then he went as suddenly back to his seat opposite Paula, whom he had startled by his vehemence.

"No, I did not know it. I did not even know that she was engaged. You quite surprised me. Who is the man that has drawn the rare prize?"

"You like Miss Gardiner?" asked Paula, naively, without answering his question.

"Yes, very much. I think her an admirable young lady."

"So do I. I like her better than any lady I ever knew. Mrs. Lysson was real kind and nice, but it was partly for her sister's sake, you know. But Miss Gardiner is even nicer. She does not make any time over you, but she makes you feel that she is just as honest as can be, and that you are to her just what her treatment of you shows. Why, she knows all about me, and yet she has never, by look or word, shown that she did not think me as worthy of her friendship as any lady born."

"One of our great poets says:

"Kind hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood."

Miss Gardiner believes in the theory that mind, and manners, and goodness, makes the lady. But you have not told me whom she is to marry."

"A Mr. Carl Van Alst—he is very rich and handsome, they say."

"Ah, I remember! I met him at luncheon once. You know him, I suppose. Do you like him?"

"No, I don't know him. I have never even seen him. He came once to Meadow Grange while I was there, but he missed a train and was too late for the regular dinner, and was obliged to breakfast early, to get back to town to attend to some important business; and the night of Mrs. Wilde's dinner-party he was not well, and Mrs. Gardiner and Miss Agnes and I went all together."

"It is strange that I have not heard of this before."

"I think they have only been engaged since the last of the summer, and it was not made public until they came to town. You will be at the wedding, I suppose?"

"Be at the wedding! Be at the wedding!" repeated Guy, with a startled, far-away look.

"No, I do not think I shall be at the wedding."

"Forgive me, cousin Guy, for asking you. I do not wonder that you cannot like weddings. But you will come and see me often, now that you are in New York?" she added, as Guy arose to go.

"I cannot promise you, my little friend," he said, gravely. "I may not be in New York long. I feel like getting back to England, to my mother and sisters."

"And are you going right away?"

"Very soon, I think. I have nothing for which to stay here. But I will see you again, before I say good-by to America."

But it is not solely woman's prerogative to change her mind; men occasionally avail themselves of that privilege. Guy Chandor decided to postpone his return to England until his cousin Clyde arrived in New York, about the fourteenth or fifteenth of December. When he had made this decision, he called again upon Paula, and then sent his card to Mrs. and Miss Gardiner.

"Ah, I thought it strange you were slighting us," Agnes said, smiling, as he was shown into their parlor. "Mrs. Clyde Chandor told us you were in New York."

"I have not called before, because I thought that I should only see you to say good-by. But I have decided to remain here still a few weeks more."

"I am glad of that," Agnes replied, cordially; and then she thrilled strangely with warmth and embarrassment as Mr. Chandor still retained her outstretched hand and gravely said:

"Allow me to congratulate you upon the approaching happy event, of which I have lately heard."

"Thank you."

It was all that Miss Gardiner could say, and it was almost coldly said. She was wondering why Guy's words, and his sincere grave man-

ner, and that wistful look in his blue eyes, had suddenly filled her soul with a great terror of her approaching marriage, a feeling that it was utterly unsatisfactory, a desire to cry out that it must not be. But she resolutely conquered these impulses, saying to herself, with supreme self-scorn, that she was getting nervous, and turned her thoughts to Mr. Chandor. She knew that it had cost him not a little to offer her his congratulations; that he was thinking keenly of his own wedding, and the mystery and pain that had followed it.

"Your journey has been entirely unsuccessful, Mrs. Chandor tells me," she said, reverting to the subject that she believed to be occupying his mind. Have you decided to give up all further attempts to find Elise?"

"I have buried all my hopes—I marvel that I ever entertained any," he said, almost drearily.

"While there is life there is hope!" exclaimed Agnes, quickly. "Pray do not speak so despairingly. You make me feel that I am, in a degree, responsible for your latest failures. I should have guarded more carefully the papers Mr. Lysson gave to my care."

"Do not blame yourself for a moment, Miss Gardiner. I have no reason to believe that the envelope, and specimens of chirography, would have availed me in the least, unless there had been some very marked peculiarity about them."

"I do not remember that there was," replied Agnes, thoughtfully.

"At all events, Miss Gardiner"—looking up, suddenly, with a faint smile—"your connection with this affair seems about to cease completely."

"Yes, and without any of Mr. Lysson's premonitions being fulfilled in regard to the future developments that were to come through my agency. I wrote Rachel, yesterday, that his superstition had been rewarded as superstitions deserve. The finding of the envelope had neither brought me good nor ill, nor to those more deeply interested in it, any success."

CHAPTER XXIV.

OF WEDDING PRESENTS AND OTHER THINGS.

"BLANCHE, Carl's wedding-cards have come!" and Issalene tossed an opened envelope into her cousin's lap.

"What fine ones! Of course everything will be in the greatest style. I should not be surprised, Issalene, if Carl's wedding proved the grandest one of the season."

"No doubt he is flattering himself that it will be a very brilliant affair," said Issalene, carelessly, not looking up from a pile of gay wools she was sorting.

"Grace Church, at four P. M.," read Blanche, "But it will be lighted. What shall you wear, Issa?"

"I do not know—I have not thought—white, I imagine."

"White! Well, ivory white will look splendidly on you. I must ask mamma to let me have a pale pink crape with black velvet; and there are the presents to select. I think mamma will give a bronze; and I decided some time ago upon mine."

"What?" queried Issalene.

"Glove and handkerchief-boxes of solid crystal, set in a delicate frame-work of carved silver, and lined with puffs of blue satin."

"You and auntie have been in haste with your selections."

"Why, the wedding is the eighteenth and this is the eighth, and there is always more or less shopping to do before you can find an article that exactly suits you, even if you have decided upon what it shall be. I would really like to know what uncle Frederick will give them."

"A set of jewelry—to Agnes; I remember that he spoke of it, when we were selecting my diamonds."

"And have you not thought at all what present you shall make?"

"Oh, you may depend upon my making a good selection, and in good time," said Issalene, gathering up her wools and going to her own room.

There she put on her hat and cloak, and fastened a heavy veil over her face; and when thus arrayed she stole quietly out of the house. When she had reached the corner, instead of hailing a stage, she kept straight on, crossing avenue after avenue, until she had left the fashionable and even the respectable portion of the city behind her; and it was not until she found herself at Avenue A that she paused. Here she waited for a Belt Line car, and rode away down into the lower portion of the city. Alighting at

a narrow, dirty street, she walked a block or two, and then entered a small drugstore.

A little sharp-featured man came toward her.

"Ah, mees has come."

"Yes; you have the powder ready?"

"It is quite ready, quite ready."

"And I am ready with the money I promised you; where is it?"

"Here, mees," laying a tiny white parcel upon the counter.

"Very well; open it, and give some to your cat, there! I will wait until I see its effects."

"What! poison my cat—my pet cat?"

"Certainly! Do you think I am such a fool as to take any worthless mixture you might choose to palm off on me? See here!"—opening a dainty purse—"here are these three, crisp, new bills for you—more money than you can make in this vile little store in a year. When you put upon this counter a paper of powder that is powerful enough to quickly kill your cat, they are yours! Cats are plenty!"

The man hesitated, and the girl added:

"Come, do not be stupid! You have your choice. Give me a powder that will kill surely and quickly—or none! You can get in no trouble. Where is the mortal to prove that I bought it here? Will you give it me or not?"

Slowly the man prepared another powder.

"Now leave the paper open and let me see you take some out and give it to the cat."

Reluctantly the druggist obeyed the girl's imperious commands. The great, sleek, gentle cat rubbed purring against his hand as he touched it, and the girl looked on unfeelingly and critically, while it lapped the deadly potion mixed in water. The trial was soon over; the animal shortly rolled, and writhed, and moaned, in awful pain, and then suddenly lay rigid and lifeless.

"That will do!" cried the Cuban, triumphantly, and she, herself, folded the paper over the powder, before she threw the bank-notes upon the counter, lowered her veil, and left the shop.

When she reached home she ran quickly to her room, unlocked a little private drawer where lay a small revolver, and deposited the powder beside the weapon.

"I have you both now!" the girl cried, fiercely.

"I wonder when will be the time to use you?"

It was just a week afterward that Issalene Sanfrey locked another treasure into that little secret storehouse—three papers. One was a piece of chocolate-colored paper, the torn cover of a novel, upon which was written an address in lead pencil; the second was a torn envelope—bearing the name of Mrs. Elise P. Chandor; and the third—was the most important of them all.

"I have been in luck to-day!" she cried, with fiendish glee. "Everything is in my hands, now, and I will see what it is like to personate Fate! You shall not die, Alan! Oh, no! I could not think of killing you, now! You shall live, because I have a much better revenge in store for you than murder! And your love—the woman for whose sake you repulsed and insulted me—she shall find how she likes being a bride only at the altar! Only at the altar, my lady! For within an hour after you marry Alan you shall know all! all!"

The little Cuban was wild with excitement. Her eyes blazed, her cheeks were flaming, and, as was usual with her when moved by intense emotion, she paced the floor with rapid restlessness. It was a long time before she grew calm; then she drew a chair before the table where her writing-desk lay, and folded her arms upon it, wearily; her eyes drooping in deep thought.

"It must be done!" she said, at last, opening the box and taking out a sheet of costly perfumed paper, and her tiny gold pen. "It must be done! I must conquer in every way—even conquer myself! And, after all, I will take care to make my lot easy. How I shall dress, and what jewels I'll have—and lovers! Ah, I will be the belle of society this year, yes, for years; for I am young and handsome!" and she glanced at her reflection in the long mirror of her dressing-case. "And if," she added, still regarding that beautiful, but fiery-eyed little figure, "he attempts to control me, or lives too long, there is always the powder!"

She drew her desk nearer, dipped her pen in the ink, and wrote:

"MY DARLING HUGH:

"You have already repeatedly urged me to set the time for our marriage, and have been so kind as to say that I might make the arrangements entirely to suit myself. I agree with you, that it is

nonsense to wait longer, and I propose Thursday, the eighteenth inst., for our marriage-day. It shall be a strictly private wedding—no one but you and I to know anything about it until it is announced in the papers the next morning. When you come to escort me to Miss Gardiner's wedding, come a half-hour early, and I will be ready, and we can drive straight to some clergyman's, be married, and then go on to Grace Church and the Van Alst-Gardiner reception. The next morning we will start for Havana. I want my wedding-trip to be a visit to my home. Come to see me to-night, prepared to assure your little love that you will carry out all her arrangements.

"Devotedly yours,

ISSALEDNE."

Her note sealed and addressed, Issalene ran gayly down the stairs, and sent for a messenger, to deliver it. Then she walked into the library and surprised a couple there: Blanche Lorrimer and Henrion Wilde. They stood by the table where Blanche had just dropped some packages, and Henrion explained, gayly—though there was a trifling look of confusion on his face, and happy and mischievous lights struggling for supremacy in his honest eyes—that he had been shopping with Miss Lorrimer, and had just helped her bring home her purchases.

"Yes, I have been getting my presents for Agnes," said Blanche.

"Have you? Well, I have chosen my present, too," exclaimed Issalene; "but I shall not tell what it is. I want it to be a surprise to every one!" and she went demurely away, leaving her cousin and Mr. Wilde to their mutual explanations and confidences.

CHAPTER XXV.

AGNES'S WEDDING-DAY.

THURSDAY, the eighteenth of December, Agnes Gardiner's wedding-day, came with a flood of sunshine, and the clearest of pale winter skies.

"My darling," Mrs. Gardiner whispered, as she went to awaken her daughter, and stooped to kiss the round, white, faultless cheeks, "if there is any faith to be placed in omens yours ought to be a very happy marriage; for your wedding-day is a perfect one."

Agnes opened her eyes, and then her lids drooped again, and she shivered slightly.

"What is it, darling?"

"Nothing, mamma. It is a trifle chilly in this room, is it not?"

"Perhaps a little. Shall I send your maid, dear? I would not let her call you earlier."

"Yes, please."

The wedding-day wore toward the wedding-hour, and all the preparations were completed for the bridal entertainment. The salons upon the parlor floor were thrown into one, and walls, cornices, chandeliers, and curtains were a mass of vines, interspersed with roses of every hue. For roses—Carl's orders had gone far and wide; he had furnished and superintended the decorations, and had determined that roses, however hard to obtain, should be the predominant flowers at his wedding. Great banks and pyramids of blossoms filled mantles and every available table, and choice floral devices were doubled in every mirror. The stairways and corridors were arches of tropical bloom, and at the upper end of the parlor hung a marvelous marriage-bell of smilax, and snowy rosebuds, spiked with fragrant clusters of orange-blossoms. While the salons upon the next floor, devoted to the many costly wedding-presents, and to the convenience of guests, were almost as profusely decorated.

Within Agnes's room, the paraphernalia of her toilet were scattered about, and she, herself, was being adorned for the bridal ceremony. She sat before her dressing-bureau, robed in a thin wrapper of puffs and embroidery, her pretty feet incased in white satin boots, exquisitely embroidered, while her maid arranged her lustrous reddish-brown hair, and her mother and little Mrs. Clyde Chandor flitted about her, or hung over the dainty bridal dress of satin and lace.

Mrs. Chandor, who was only going to the church, and had been up to view the presents, was chatting of them as she helped, or pretended to help, with Agnes's toilet.

"What an elegant picture that is, that Mr. and Mrs. Lysson sent; and I like cousin Guy's presents, those lovely golden lilies holding the toilet-bottles."

"And I like," said Agnes, smiling, "the exquisite little gemmed cupids that Mrs. Clyde Chandor selected, to guard my jewels."

"Oh, I did not select it entirely!" cried Paula, blushing. "Clyde was with me. Only the minute I saw that casket, I said I knew you would admire it. But I did not see Mr. Van Alst's present there."

"No, it has only just arrived. It is a necklace

and locket, and the first picture he had painted for the locket was not a correct likeness, and there was considerable delay about getting the second one finished. Mamma, please show it to Mrs. Chandor."

Mrs. Gardiner placed a satin case in Paula's hands, containing a necklace and locket of diamonds.

"How magnificent! May I look at the picture?"

"Certainly; then when you see Mr. Van Alst in church you will be able to tell if you think it a nice one."

Paula opened the flashing cover that hid a finely finished ivory-type of Carl Van Alst.

"Is this—this—Mr. Van Alst?" she cried, with a great start.

"Yes," said Agnes, who was studying the arrangement of her hair in the glass. "Do you like his looks?"

"He is a very handsome man, is he not?"

"He is considered so."

"And are his eyes, and hair, and beard, correctly colored, here?"

"Yes, I consider this a most perfect likeness."

Paula closed the locket and replaced the diamonds in their case.

"I must go," she said; "Clyde and Guy will be expecting me, by this time. And I must say good-by to you, for I shall not see you after you come from the church. I hope you will be very happy," she murmured, tremulously, as she pressed her lips to Agnes's brow. And then she ran swiftly to her own rooms.

"Oh, Clyde!" she cried, rushing into their parlor, and flinging herself at her husband's feet, pale and trembling and tearful. "Mr. Carl Van Alst is the gentleman who gave me that envelope last summer!"

"Impossible!" cried Guy and Clyde in a breath.

"Put it is! I have just seen his picture."

"(Only a picture," said her husband, laughing, and petting her. "You cannot tell anything by that. Probably, when you see him, he will not look at all as you think."

"But it was an ivory-type, Clyde; and the color of his eyes and hair and beard were all there, and I could not be mistaken. I never saw any other man who was handsome in the same way he was, with such golden-brown hair and beard, and great soft eyes, and yet such a dark, foreign face. Oh, no, I was not mistaken! He is the man! And I did not dare tell her!"

The gentlemen looked perplexedly at each other.

"What shall you do?" asked Clyde.

"I hardly know," answered Guy, gravely, thinking deeply.

"Is it not possible that when Paula comes to see Mr. Van Alst she may discover that she is mistaken?"

"No, I am not mistaken!" interrupted Mrs. Chandor, decisively.

"Or," continued her husband, "may not Miss Gardiner have known all along that her lover was the man, or that he knows something about Elise?"

"Paula," Guy said, without answering his cousin's questions, "have you an envelope handy?"

He hastily penciled a line on one of his cards, placed it in an envelope, and left the room. He had made his decision—whether it was for good or ill, who could tell?

"Grant Mr. Guy Chandor a moment's interview? Impossible!" exclaimed Agnes, reading the card brought to her while her maid completed her coiffure. Still, when the lustrous puffs and braids were all arranged, she went into the little parlor where he waited.

In the instant during which she approached him, half-offended, half-anxious, Guy thought how wondrously fair she was, and how calm, and almost repented of his errand; but, then—she was waiting for him to speak, and the die was cast.

"I shall not ask you to excuse this strange call, Miss Gardiner; if I am wrong, perhaps, some time in the future, you will be generous enough to pardon me; if right—I know you will uphold the right, at any cost. I wish to ask one question—do you know whether Mr. Carl Van Alst ever knew or met Elise Wallbridge, or Elise Chandor?"

The bride's violet eyes dilated with intense surprise.

"What do you mean? How could he have known her? Why do you ask?"

"Mrs. Clyde Chandor has identified Mr. Van Alst as the person who gave her, last summer, the envelope addressed to my wife. Now, can

you help me to answer your own question—could he have known?"

For a moment Agnes stood with drooped eyes, her cheeks a living flame-color; then she looked up, and turned ghostly white, and wrung her hands together.

"Mr. Chandor, please get a carriage ready for me, and I will join you at the door in less than a minute."

She hurried to her room, caught up a shawl and wrapped it about her, told the astonished maid that she would shortly be back, and flew down to the street where Guy awaited her, and led her through the canopied arch to the curb.

"I want to go to Mrs. Lorrimer's. Please come with me! Tell the driver to go at his utmost speed. There is over a half-hour yet, before Carl will come."

They entered the carriage, and the horses fairly flew up the avenue. For some minutes neither spoke: then Guy could not bear longer the awful silence, and the sight of Agnes's rigid, ghostly face.

"Miss Gardiner, I pray, for your sake, that this may be a terrible mistake!"

"If it is a mistake it must be proved before my marriage," she said, sternly, "and even doubts must be set at rest," and neither spoke again until the carriage reached Mrs. Lorrimer's. Another carriage had just stopped there, and Mr. De Lancy was going up the steps.

Agnes and Mr. Chandor followed quickly, and were admitted at the same time.

"Tell Miss Blanche that Miss Gardiner wishes to see her, without an instant's delay," commanded Agnes to the servant.

The message was no sooner delivered than Blanche Lorrimer came flying down the stairway, and into the parlor where Agnes had thrown herself upon a chair, a strange, white, rigid figure—a few orange-blossoms nestling in her burnished hair, a plaid shawl wrapped about her shoulders, and her thin wrapper trailing about her feet. Guy stood silent, near, wondering whether some weighty revelation, or only bitter mortification, was to follow the unheard-of interruption in the even flow of the wedding arrangements, for which he must be held responsible. While Mr. De Lancy viewed the two with unspeakable astonishment.

"What is it? What has happened?" cried Blanche, making a brilliant central figure in her trailing black velvet robe and a profusion of pink *crepe de chine*.

"Blanche!" exclaimed Agnes, springing from her seat, and stretching both hands entreatingly toward the girl, "I want you to answer me a few questions, as truthfully as if you had kissed God's Bible and stood upon the witness-stand."

"What?" asked Blanche, growing terrified.

"How long have you known Carl Van Alst?"

"Almost all my life. He is my uncle Frederick's nephew, you know, and visits us considerably when in this country."

"Has he ever seen or spoken of Elise Wallbridge?"

Blanche turned deathly white, with a sudden dreadful suspicion.

"What do you mean? He has seen her twice—when she spent her vacation here and one night the following summer!"

Agnes turned to Mr. Chandor.

"Can it be possible?" she asked, faintly. And at that moment another figure appeared at the open doorway—a figure in white silk, and garlands of roses, and glittering diamonds, looking far more a bride than the bride-elect with her bloodless face and strange *dishabille*.

"Possible!" cried Blanche, excitedly. "You do not mean—you can't think—that Carl had anything to do with Elise's flight?"

But, before any one could answer, Issalene Sanfrey had comprehended the whole scene, and knew that, even now, though sooner than she had anticipated, had come the hour for her revenge.

"It is possible!" she said, excitedly, springing into the room, her cheeks aflame and her eyes flashing. "Elise Wallbridge loved him! and he pretended to love her! At all events he married her, and she, his wife—his true wife—is living not ten blocks from here!"

With a low cry Agnes sunk back into her chair, and the next instant, quickly following a peal of the bell, Mr. Frederick Van Alst walked into the midst of the pale group.

"What does this mean?" he demanded, glancing swiftly around.

"It means," replied Issalene, fiercely, her hate breaking forth, now, with a force that made it palpable to all of her horrified listeners, "that Miss Gardiner has just made the discovery that the man she is about to marry is the husband of another woman!"

"Issalene Sanfrey, are you mad? What proofs have you of this atrocious story?"

"These proofs!" she answered, with fiendish triumph, holding up a sealed envelope. "These proofs that I had meant to give Miss Gardiner, an hour from now, as her wedding-present!"

Mr. Van Alst snatched the envelope from the girl's hand and tore it open. Three papers were within—the torn cover of a book, a mutilated envelope and a marriage-certificate.

"My God!" the proud old man exclaimed, as he read the last. "If this is true, my daughter Gertrude was never his wife!" and in the agony of this wretched discovery he would have fallen, had not Guy Chandor sprung forward with strong, outstretched arms.

"Ah, poor girl," Mr. Van Alst said, opening his eyes and extending his hand feebly and pityingly toward Agnes. "Alan Torrence is indeed a villain! You may thank God that you are not another victim."

"Alan Torrence?" repeated Agnes, looking around questioningly.

"Yes, you know—surely Carl told you—how he came to change his name?" said Blanche, kneeling by Agnes's side and chafing the bride-elect's cold hands.

"No! What new fraud is this that has been perpetrated?" asked Agnes with sudden fury.

"Carl Van Alst was his middle name, and by his grandfather's will he was obliged to drop the name of Alan Torrence and retain his grandfather's name, of Carl Van Alst. We all supposed that you knew that."

"And the certificate? Will some one show me the certificate?"

Guy put it in her hand, and she read:

"This certifies that the rite of holy matrimony was celebrated between Alan C. V. Torrence, of New York, and Elise P. Wallbridge, of Chicago, June —, —, in the village of Darby, near Philadelphia, by me—
JOHN C. EDWARDS."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A WOMAN'S HATE AND A MAN'S CONFESSION.

WHILE Agnes Gardiner read the certificate of her lover's marriage to Elise Wallbridge, Guy Chandor spoke softly to Mr. Van Alst.

"Of course the wedding must be stopped."

"Of course! Of course!" said Mr. Van Alst, making a great effort to rally from the shock of the terrible blow that had come to him.

"Well, will you attend to matters, sir, or can I be of service to you?"

"I want Carl here! Do you think you could drive back to the hotel for him? He will probably be waiting there. And send a note round to one of the ushers—young Wilde, perhaps, to have the people sent home; just say that the wedding cannot take place, and use my name."

As Guy started to fulfill these orders, Mr. De Lancy, too, arose to go.

"You are not going without me?" cried Issalene, clinging to his arm.

"No! Stay, Mr. De Lancy!" said Mr. Van Alst, firmly. "As the betrothed husband of my niece, Issalene Sanfrey, it is well that you should know any further developments that wretched girl has to make, affecting the happiness of others and her own character!"

"How dare you talk of me in that way before my affianced husband?" demanded Issalene, breaking out into another ungovernable fit of fury.

"Suppose you tell me—it is quite time that all facts were made known—how is it that you knew that Alan Torrence was married, and have waited until this late hour before divulging such a villainous secret?"

"I did not mean to tell until he was married," retorted the little Cuban. "Did I not tell you I was saving these papers for a wedding-present?"

"Issalene! Issalene!" cried Mrs. Lorrimer, faintly. She had joined the group, and Blanche had stolen to her side and whispered of the dreadful disclosures. But Issalene took no notice of the horrified appeal.

"What did I care for her?" she went on, with a gesture of disdain toward Agnes, who now lay back in her chair with controlled but ashy face, a motionless, attentive listener. "For her sake—for fear, I suppose, that I should betray to her the facts that he had been Alan Torrence, and as Alan Torrence had loved Elise Wallbridge, for he learned that I suspected him—he made love to me! For her sake—when he believed that I had no substantial proofs against him, and that matters had gone too far with her, for her to dare to make a scandal by breaking her engagement, just upon the strength of my suspicions—he mocked at my love! insulted me! Then I vowed I would kill him! And I would! Oh, you need not look at me, all of you!

I would have killed him, if three days ago I had not stumbled across his wife, and gained a surer method of revenge! I wanted to show him in his true colors, and disgrace him! to ruin him! And I have done it!"

"You have disgraced yourself, as well," said her guardian, sternly. "You stand before us confessing to cruelty, and wickedness, and murderous resolves, that make you a fit subject for a lunatic cell. You do not deserve the name of woman, but fiend! You are a disgrace to your family!"

"Had you not better remember that last sentence to repeat for Alan's benefit?" sneered Issalene.

"How came you by these papers?"

"I can answer for how she obtained two of them," said Agnes, clearly. "She took them from my pocket-book while at Wilde Manor."

"Quite right, Miss Gardiner," retorted the little fury. "I heard you tell Blanche that you had two specimens of penmanship as clews, whereby to trace Elise Wallbridge's whereabouts, and I took them, so that if they were Alan's you might not use them against him!"

"And the certificate?"

"Perhaps she stole that, too, or invented it," cried Blanche.

"Oh, no! Do not flatter yourselves! I was in Macy's on Monday, and dropped that envelope taking some change from my purse. When I reached another counter I discovered that I had lost it. I went immediately back and found that the shop-girl had picked it up, and handed it to another customer—a little ghost, who was nearly fainting at sight of it. I claimed it; and then I discovered that the woman was Elise."

"And is she in New York?" cried Agnes.

"Not ten blocks away, I tell you! I went home with her, and got her to tell me how and when she was married, and I discovered that she had a certificate. She thought Alan was already married. I told her that he had married Gertrude, and that Gertrude was dead, and that he intended marrying again; and I persuaded her to give me the certificate, by telling her that the lady was a great friend of Blanche's and that Blanche would show her the certificate and so prevent Alan's marrying so wickedly; and that when Alan found out that we knew, he would live with her, and let every one know that she was his wife!"

"Oh, Issalene! And you did not intend to do this?" asked Mrs. Lorrimer, in distress, still unable to believe all this wickedness of her niece.

"Of course not!" rung out the Cuban's defiant answer; "I was going to murder Alan, but I thought that to reveal this secret at this brilliant wedding of his, would be much better revenge!"

"Issalene!" exclaimed Mr. Van Alst. "You had better be careful how you utter many more such damning confessions! We may be forced to use them against you in a way you will not like! Is there any one here," he added, "who would go for Alan's wife?"

"I will go," said Mr. De Lancy, arising with an evident desire to effect an escape from these strange and stormy scenes.

"Without me?" said Issalene. "You know we are to be married to-night!"

"Mr. De Lancy, under these circumstances I can scarcely believe that you will still desire to marry my niece. If such is the case, I hope you will understand that I, as her guardian, consider you honorably released from your engagement."

"Thank you. I think Miss Sanfrey will agree with me that we had at least better postpone any immediate ratification of our engagement."

"Or, perhaps, we had better consider it canceled. I'm entirely agreeable," sneered Issalene.

"Very well, we will consider it canceled," answered Mr. De Lancy, gravely. For all his love for the dark-eyed beauty, she had betrayed too unscrupulous a morality, and too dangerous a disposition, for him to care to trust his future in her fair, little, wicked hands.

"I am at your command, sir, if I can go for the lady you mentioned," he said to Mr. Van Alst.

"I will go too, uncle Frederick. Poor little Elise will come with me," announced Blanche. And the brilliant beauty, in her splendid costume, set out with her elderly escort, to seek the forlorn, sorrowful, faded little wife, who, three years before, had been her pretty, innocent school-friend.

Shortly after they were driven away, another carriage rolled up the street, from which Mrs. Gardiner, Guy Chandor and Carl Van Alst alighted.

The moment that Carl Van Alst entered the parlor, he guessed that something awful had happened, and that it related to himself he could not doubt, when he saw his uncle's lowering brow, Agnes's colorless, scornful face, and Issalene's blazing eyes and wicked, triumphant smile; but that anything more than suspicion was to greet him, he did not dream.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked, proudly and dictatorially. "This gentleman," indicating Guy, who had gently led Mrs. Gardiner to her daughter's side, where she sat in mute perplexity and alarm, "informed me that Miss Gardiner desired my presence here."

"We all desire your presence here!" rejoined his uncle, wrathfully. "We wish you to understand that your wedding cannot go on! That the man who has one wife living, and has been guilty of bigamy once, and has attempted to add still another to his list of victims, has been detected in his crimes!"

There was scarcely a perceptible change in Carl's handsome, defiant face.

"Suppose you explain what you are talking about, sir?"

"There is no need to explain, if you will read that!"

Carl took the slip of paper his uncle handed him—the certificate of his marriage to Elise Wallbridge—and as he realized what it was, his dusky face suddenly paled. Then Issalene's laugh rung out scornful and vindictive.

"Ah, you see now what a woman's hate can do!"

Without noticing her, he turned insolently to his uncle.

"Would it not have been less idiotic, sir, for you to have proved the truth of this paper, before making all this fuss about a miserable lie, probably concocted by that insane girl yonder, who is willing to commit any absurdity that she imagines will be a revenge upon me for not happening to fall in love with her?"

"Mr. Van Alst," said Guy Chandor, calmly, addressing the elder gentleman, "if you will allow me to speak, since I am very sadly and closely connected with this affair, I think I can prove to Mr. Alan Torrence that we have a pretty clear case against him."

"Go on!" said Mr. Van Alst, while Carl, with a sneering, impenetrable face, leaned against the arched doorway.

"Mr. Alan Torrence, in this house, met and made love to Elise Wallbridge, and, strangely enough, no one suspected his power over her, except the one woman whose eyes a rival love made unusually keen. He played fast and loose with his victim, until at last he coaxed or forced her—a shy, timid girl, easily influenced and controlled—into eloping with him. This is proved by this certificate, which has been gained from Elise, who will soon be here to authenticate it. Also, he has been identified by a lady now at the Everett House, who journeyed upon the same train with him last summer from Baltimore or Philadelphia, and—"

"From Philadelphia," interrupted Issalene. "That was where he kept Elise."

"—And to whom he gave this envelope; little thinking that, from the hands of the stranger, it would be thrown into a bureau-drawer at a hotel, and remain there nearly two months, to fall into the hands of the very woman he was endeavoring to win for a wife, and, through her, into the hands of the sister and husband of the girl he had seduced into an elopement, upon the very day after her marriage!"

Agnes drew a hard, quick breath.

"Why, she was not married to you! Have you not noticed the date of the certificate? She was his wife nearly a year before that!"

Over Guy's face spread a strange pallor, followed by a look of relief—almost of joy. Perhaps it was scarcely to be wondered at that, after all this misery and mystery, he was glad to know himself a free man again. But, at Agnes's words, the first she had uttered since his entrance, a sudden change came over Carl. He advanced to where she sat, and held out his hands with a look of mad, unconquerable passion.

"Agnes, you know that my love for you has been no lie, but one terrible, unalterable truth! You will not rob me of the one joy in life I covet? You will not believe these things they are saying against me?"

Even as he had turned to bitterness the love of others, so, now, his pleadings met only scorn.

"Mr. Van Alst! do not dare to speak to me again! Your very presence is an insult and a pollution! Can you not imagine how I loathe and despise you?"

He stepped back with his face livid and his

liquid brown eyes charged with hard despair and reckless effrontery.

"Very well! You cannot loathe me more, if I satisfy you with all the facts! I did like Elise, and the girl was so fond of me, and such a pretty little Puritan, that I was fool enough to marry her! That was three years ago, next June. It was arranged that she should meet me in Philadelphia, instead of going directly on to Chicago. We stayed there almost a week; her parents thought she was with the Lorrimers. Some time, during her next year at school, I was to make the marriage known. Not a week after, I was summoned to Germany, where I found that my grandfather had just died, and that I, the son of his daughter and eldest child, was to inherit a splendid fortune, only by dropping my own name and taking his, and marrying my cousin Gertrude. I did not stop to consider how I should arrange matters here. Gertrude approved of the will, and we were married. The first thing I did, when I was free and reached New York again, was to seek Elise. I followed her to Chicago, and happened to be at the depot just as she and Mr. Chandor took a train for St. Louis. I got upon the same train, and accompanied them to St. Louis, and discovered by the hotel register who they were. I could not understand Elise's marrying. She was not a girl to betray a secret, and I had sent her a note, just before going to Germany, notifying her that it might be months before she heard from me.

"Anxious to discover if she had made any revelations which would endanger me, I instantly wrote her a note, asking her to meet me, as soon as possible, not two blocks from the hotel. I watched the house, saw her come out, joined her, and found that she had never revealed her secret, but receiving a note from Issalene Sanfrey, immediately upon her return to Vassar, saying that I was married to Gertrude Van Alst, and not hearing from me, she had believed that I had never really married her; and not daring to confess this to any one, had allowed herself to be married to Mr. Chandor. Her love for me was so violent, and she so dreaded her secret being discovered, that I thought best to bring her East, where I settled her in Philadelphia, as Mrs. Torrence."

"I suppose you understand," his uncle demanded, coldly, when they had listened to the young man's defiant confession of his wrong doings, "that all but a specified portion of the property that came to you through your grandfather, reverts to myself; and that you are, at this moment, liable to arrest and punishment for bigamy?"

"The property you can take! The other revenge, sir, I think you will forego! Since it can only involve in scandal many other parties besides myself, I am sure you will accept my advice to keep it quiet!" and Carl turned insolently toward the entrance.

As he jerked open the door, a tiny, ghostly, white face met his, and a pitiful, yearning cry ran through the broad hall.

"Alan! Oh, my Alan!"

The man only tore himself rudely away from the little clinging hands, and dashed down the steps; and with a terrible, despairing cry, that wrung the hearts of all who listened, the young wife sunk lifeless upon the threshold that, three Christmas-tides before, she had entered with an unruffled, untutored girlish soul.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ELISE LEARNS A NEW THEOLOGY.

It was many hours before Elise Torrence was restored to consciousness.

During that time, Issalene had shut herself in her own apartments, Guy Chandor had escorted Mrs. Gardiner and Agnes back to the hotel, and Mr. Frederick Van Alst had gone to his rooms, to do all that he could toward setting straight, and keeping quiet, the terrible trouble in which his guilty nephew had involved so many persons. For he had seen that there was, as Alan had scornfully advised, but one course to follow, and that to hush up the whole matter as much as possible. It could do no good to further punish Alan, at the expense of the scandal in which it would involve Agnes Gardiner and the memory of his dead daughter. There was sure to be enough gossip, that would get abroad, as it was.

Mrs. Gardiner, too, was thinking of this, as she and Agnes alighted at the hotel, whence the canopy had been removed, and curious waiters were tearing away the magnificent floral decorations within.

Agnes shuddered as she passed wearily up the broad stairways, that at this hour should have echoed with the gay voices of her wedding-guests.

"My darling, now terribly you must have—"

suffered!" her mother said, tenderly, as the door closed them within the quiet of their little parlor. "Oh, if I could only bear some of this sorrow for you!"

"Do not think my heart is broken, mamma! It is only my pride that suffers and I have deserved this punishment! For days—yes, for weeks, now, my heart has refused to sanction this marriage. But I had not the courage to break it off!" and Agnes leaned her head upon her mother's shoulder, and shed some bitter tears.

"But you will like to go immediately home, to Meadow Grange. I will telegraph and we can start in the morning. Marie can finish the packing, and come later. I think Mr. Chandor will kindly attend to returning the wedding-presents."

"Yes, mamma, he will do all he can to help us; and I shall rather spend the winter at home; but I cannot consent to go, until I see Elise again, and know what she is to do."

"Very well, we will stay over a day or two, if you wish, but now you must certainly try to get some rest."

So Agnes's room was cleared of the bridal finery, which her maid packed hastily away, and she was soothed to rest by her mother's gentle hands.

The next morning, Miss Gardiner sent for Mr. Guy Chandor, and ascertained that he had telegraphed for Mr. and Mrs. Wallbridge, and had a letter ready to send to Rachel by the Saturday's mail. She then prepared to call at Mrs. Lorrimer's, whither Guy proposed to escort her.

Blanche Lorrimer met Miss Gardiner with some constraint. She scarcely knew what manner to adopt toward her friend, until Agnes set her quite at ease, by her entire forgetfulness of self and intense sympathy for Elise. This sympathy Blanche fully shared; and recounted what they had done for the young wife.

"The first thing she said, when she came to, about midnight, was, 'Where's Alan?' Mamma told her, as gently as she could, that we had sent for Alan, but he could not be found, as he was not at his rooms. Since then she has not spoken. We brought her baby and its nurse, but she will not notice it."

"Can I see her?"

"Oh, yes; and I hope you can get her to talk."

Blanche led the way to the large room where Elise lay motionless upon the bed, and Agnes went straight to the girl's side.

"Elise," she said, "I am Agnes Gardiner. Will you not speak to me?"

At sound of that calm, musical voice, Mrs. Torrence turned and looked into Agnes's weary, white face.

"You were Rachel's friend. I knew it when Issalene told me you were to marry Alan. And you loved him, too? I am sorry for you."

"I cannot say that I loved him greatly, Elise. You need not be sorry for me."

"And you do not care because I stopped your wedding?"

"Care! I thank God for it! Did you never think how wrong it was, Elise, to keep your marriage a secret?"

"Wrong?" repeated the girl, wonderingly. "It would have been wrong to tell when he did not wish. Nothing was wrong that I did for Alan!"

"My poor child," said Agnes, gently, taking the tiny hand, "you are mistaken; everything was wrong that he got you to do. It was wrong to enter into an engagement and marriage of which your parents knew nothing—wrong to keep it a secret. By doing so, see what a terrible sin you enabled Alan to commit, when he pretended to be the husband of his cousin Gertrude, and what a terrible sin you committed against Mr. Chandor. If you had told, there would have been none of this trouble and disgrace that has been going on for two years, and culminated last night in Alan Torrence being a discovered criminal; how much guilt you would have kept him from, and what dreadful misery you would have saved Rachel, and Mr. Chandor, and your parents."

Elise was looking at her with strangely startled eyes.

"Have I done all this? Have they all cared?"

"You did not mean to do so much wrong, I know; but you have caused those who loved you much sorrow—Rachel and Mr. Chandor and your father and mother."

"But they did not love me as I loved Alan!"

"Perhaps not; but they loved you very

much, and you had no right to sin so against them."

"Are they very angry at me?"

"Angry! No, indeed! They all forgive you, I am sure, and will rejoice that you are found. Your father and mother are probably on their journey here now."

"Oh, don't let them come! They will scold me and say I must not love Alan! And I cannot help loving him! I shall die without him!"

"And leave your baby?"

"He did not love the baby, and I do not think I do, much."

"But you will by and by, and your parents will love it dearly, too."

"No, they will be angry at us both."

"My dear child, how can you think so? Why, my mother would love me just the same no matter what I did, and so will yours. Perhaps she will not have the same way of showing it, but she will be kind."

"If I had thought so, perhaps I should have told them. But I did not think any one had ever loved me, but Alan; and when he was gone I had no one to tell my troubles to, and I wanted to die!"

"There was always God, to whom you could tell your troubles, Elise."

"Oh, no! He only likes dreadfully unpleasant, pious people; and I never cared to have anything to do with Him."

"Elise," said Agnes, pitifully, "you have very many things to learn. Your whole life has been a mistake. But, above all things, remember that 'God is love.' He cares, most tenderly, for all those who are in error, or astray, and He wishes no one to be other than perfectly natural, and joyous, and true to the right."

"If ministers, and the people who call themselves good, taught that, how much less misery there would be in the world," the girl said, with unconscious irony, condemning those who had been, in a measure, responsible for her errors and sufferings.

Presently she said, with growing interest in others than herself:

"Do you know Mr. Chandor?"

"Yes, he is here; would you like to see him?"

"Oh, I'm afraid," she answered, shivering.

"You need not be, of him. He is too noble a gentleman to think or say anything harsh," and Agnes signed to Blanche to call him.

In a few minutes the tall, Saxon-fair man was kneeling at Elise's side.

"Poor little girl!"

It was all he said, but the tones were so tender, that Elise commenced to sob, and even Blanche and Agnes felt the tears come to their eyes.

"Do not cry, little one! I suffered a great deal at first. It was so hard, you see, not to know where you were, and even whether you were alive. But I have gotten over that now. I am only very sorry for you. If you ever want a friend, you will not forget that I am one, Elise?"

"No; oh, no!"

Her visitors bade Elise good-morning, then, and it was years before they two saw her again.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE READING OF THE MYSTERY.

ALAN TORRENCE took a steamer for Europe upon the Saturday following the Thursday which was to have been his wedding-day to Agnes Gardiner.

This news was not broken to Elise until her father and mother had been with her some days, treating her with a forbearance and affection so unexpected to the poor wife that she had fallen back upon their care and protection with a docile, weary, but spiritless sort of dependence. When she learned that Alan put the ocean between her and him, she consented to return to Chicago, upon her father's promise that he would write to her husband and demand of him a succinct statement of his plans in regard to his wife and child. She still hoped in her heart-broken way, that Alan would now return to her, or send for her to go to him.

But the letter Mr. Wallbridge sent, was never delivered to Alan; the faithless husband traveled directly to Italy, where he remained during the winter, and when that installment of mail reached him, in the early spring, he was tossing in delirious agony with a Southern fever. Later, the American dailies contained this notice:

"Died, in Rome, Italy, March —, —, Alan C. V. Torrence, of New York."

Probably there was not one of those persons who had been intimately connected with Alan Torrence's life who sincerely mourned his death, except his wife, and probably, the fiery jealous Cuban girl, who had been sent to her island home, where those who had suffered through her hoped she would always remain.

"My dear Agnes," said Mrs. Wilde, one day in May, when she had taken a run down to Meadow Grange to visit her favorite, and had casually mentioned Alan's death, "I should very much like to know how that poor little wife of his bears it."

"I had a letter from Mrs. Wallbridge, yesterday. She says that Elise is more quiet and patient under the blow than they had dared to hope. They are going to Europe with her, this summer, and they think that the change, and being with Rachel, again, will do her much good."

"And you have gotten quite over the effects of that horrible affair, I see. You were never looking better and handsomer."

"I am glad to hear it, and so I know is mamma. She has worried about me no end, though there has not been the slightest reason for it. But you said you had so much news to tell us," she added, anxious not to be the theme of conversation.

"Ah, yes; Flossy Rodwell is to be married in two or three weeks, to Willis Leonard, and they sail for England. I never knew, until quite lately, what trouble she made between Henrion and Blanche Lorrimer."

"But matters are all right, now?" questioned Agnes, smiling.

"Yes, indeed; Henrion will be married next fall, and I am very pleased with his choice."

And then Mrs. Wilde gave a tiny sigh as she thought of the hopes she had been wont to cherish for her son and Agnes. "But I have the greatest surprise of all to tell you," she continued. "Marion is engaged! Guess to whom!"

"Impossible! I never was good at guessing. You must be charitable and tell me."

"To Mr. Frederick Van Alst."

"What a magnificent match for her! I hope she loves him and will be happy."

"Oh, I assure you she is very fond of him! And he adores her. Do you know that he is arranging to settle all of Alan's property, and more than was really his share, on his wife and child? And, now, Mrs. Gardiner, I want to know when you are going to send Agnes into society again? All of her friends are asking for her."

Mrs. Gardiner smiled.

"Agnes knows best when she cares to go."

"Well, I should like to have her come to me, again, for the summer. I am sure I do not know how I shall ever get on without her. Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Chandor are coming."

"That will be nice for you," replied Agnes, but for myself I cannot make any plans yet. I feel most like staying here at Meadow Grange, with mamma."

"Perhaps Mrs. Gardiner will be persuaded to come, too, this summer."

"We will see," said Agnes when they bade their visitor good-by.

But that night there came another visitor to Meadow Grange who made all Agnes's plans for her. In the sweet-scented May night the two promenaded the old porch, and Guy Chandor said:

"Agnes, I have loved you a long time—or it seems a long time to me, there was such utter hopelessness in those first months. But ever since I have known myself free, I have dared to dream that you might one day let me love you, and love me in return. Tell me if my dream has been in vain?"

With a knowledge, already, of how utterly her heart had yielded its devotion to this man, Agnes turned swiftly, and hid her proud head upon his breast, and drew down his grave, tender face to hers.

"My darling, I love you," she whispered.

"God bless you, dear!" he answered solemnly, and then his golden mustache brushed her cheeks, and his lips claimed the kisses hers gladly yielded.

And thus the mystery which had strangely involved their two lives was read at last.

THE END.

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